

RADICAL FAITH
A DISCIPLESHIP TOOL FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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MAY 2007

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife,
Deborah Ethel Fillebrown

I am thankful for her gift Faith
and for her faith in me.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis bears my name, but there are countless people, experiences, and lessons learned that have all gone into the completed product.

I am indebted to the editorial eye of Carolyn Gilmore who patiently read this thesis thoroughly. In addition to her gift as an editor, she knows how to ask good questions that work toward greater clarity.

Barbara Kohl brought a wonderful combination of an excellent theological mind and a genuine heart for Christ. I am grateful for her patience in reading the initial drafts of this thesis and for her gracious spirit in knowing when to make good suggestions and, at other times, allowing me to come to the realization that particular areas needed additional work.

My classmates in this Doctor of Ministry Program shared their love, thoughts, and ideas in a way that deepened and broadened my way of thinking and the manner in which I view those who make up the corporate body of Christ.

Dr. Gary Parrett brought keen theological and cultural insight to bear throughout the course of our program, but most of all, he shared his heart for worship and reminded us that all of life is lived in worship to the Lord.

I would also like to acknowledge my 100-year-old great aunt Elisabeth Fillebrown Dennett – born in August 1906. She was so excited about my doctoral studies and she expressed a desire to see me achieve my degree. When the going was difficult, I thought of her and pressed on.

It is my deepest desire that this thesis will help those who make up the orchestra of God to resonate with Christ and to play the music for all the world to hear for time and eternity.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of *Radical Faith* is to address the subject of faith that is not static or staid, but alive and dynamic as illustrated by the roots of a tree as opposed to the immovable stones of a foundation.

The locus of *Radical Faith* is the local church in general and Chiltonville Congregational Church (CCC) in particular. More than being academic, historical, or statistical, this thesis is intended to help people move closer to Christ in their walk of faith. It does so by providing information that is balanced, comprehensive, and biblically consistent. It also provides an environment where peoples' questions can be brought to light and discussed in an effort to foster faith. The objective of this thesis is also to provide a unifying theology for the Church as it seeks to highlight the dynamic truths of Christian faith that provide believers with a rooted-ness that enables them to grow and to be sustained in the climate of the world in which we live.

This purpose is pursued in four ways: 1) in an exegetical consideration of the biblical meaning of "foundations" or "rootedness"; 2) in outlining the manner in which the postmodern continuum parallels the development of science; 3) by an assessment (by way of a survey) of the faith dynamic at work through the network of relationships generated by one church, CCC and 4) a discovery/discipling tool that serves to communicate the dynamic truths of Christian faith to those who are seeking in their journey of faith and to disciple believers as they seek to be more knowledgeable, faithful, and obedient in their service to the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER ONE

The Problem and Its Setting

THE PROBLEM AND ITS CORRESPONDING CHALLENGE

In general terms, this thesis develops a means to communicate and convey the dynamic truth of Christian faith to all kinds of people. In specific terms, its aim is to communicate and convey the dynamic truth of Christian faith to a particular people in a particular church, Chiltonville Congregational Church in Plymouth, Massachusetts.

It's important to keep the general and the specific parameters equally in mind. It is necessary to be mindful of the specific because specific individuals that comprise a particular church are a primary concern. At the same time, the prevailing thinking must be mindful of the general, because as a "village church" Chiltonville Congregational invites all kinds of people from all kinds of religious backgrounds into its doors seeking to be ministered to in a wide variety of ways.

An array of factors make ministry a complex challenge in light of the emergence of postmodernism. The term "postmodern" does not define a specific time period or serve to categorize people effectively. Some elect to define the modern era in terms of rebellion and political change while others see it in terms of science. The modern era can be defined historically as a span of 200 years – from the fall of the Bastille in 1789 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. It can also be identified with the dawn of the Enlightenment and the development of scientific method, which brought with it a corresponding understanding and approach to truth. Scientifically, the modern era faded with the discovery and development of quantum physics, a theory questioning

both particle physics based science and relationships defined strictly by cause and effect.

Another approach defines modernity through technology and the resulting paradigm shifts accompanying major technological developments. The premodern era ended with the advent of the printing press. The modern era effectively ended with the advent of the computer and the Internet. In both of these instances information and ideas became more widely distributed, explicitly and implicitly affecting the ways we think and live.

Another aspect of the challenge of understanding postmodernism is the need to resist the temptation to oversimplify what postmodernism is. A scientific, intellectual, mechanistic, modern worldview operates on the premise that complicated processes can be broken down into their component or constituent parts. The rationale behind this way of thinking is that the ability to understand each of the respective parts leads to an understanding (and a mastery) of the larger whole. One of the drawbacks of a modern worldview is that too often it sees humanity primarily or strictly in formulaic and mechanistic terms. Postmodern thinking rejects this premise - this kind of reductionist, reconstructive model. In contrast, postmodernism speaks in terms of "de-construction". This reductionist tendency is especially dangerous with regard to what it means to be human. The way history is understood further complicates this challenge. Premodernism, modernism, postmodernism, and whatever will follow after it are not distinct historical periods. Historically, socially, scientifically, and culturally they must be viewed as a continuum, with one era blending and bleeding into another. Today, it is possible to see elements of the pre-mod-post continuum evidenced in various ways and in one individual or cultural community

simultaneously. By way of example, a more intuitive/artistic approach to truth can define the premodern era. The modern era leaned toward a more scientific, intellectual view of truth. The postmodern views truth more in terms of the individual as well as how individuals function in community. No person is strictly one (pre, mod, or post) over against another.

Having spoken in broad terms, the focus of this thesis becomes more specific in relation to the Church overall and the local church specifically. The challenge for the Church is to be missional, to develop the means to communicate the message of the Gospel in a way that truly seeks to take into consideration the complexities of the current cultural landscape and the deeper reality of what it means to be human. Such an approach will be less propositional and more presuppositional, participatory, and relational. This thinking stems from the postmodern assertion that there is no such thing as an objective observer. The observer is actually a participant in the overall process that is at work. What is true in the scientific realm is also true with regard to evangelism. The process is not a matter of one individual pouring information into the mind of another. It is not a matter of arguing that certain propositions are true over and against some other set of competing propositions. It is not a kind of imperialistic relationship where “I”, as the person who possesses faith, am giving to “you” as the non-possessor of faith, what “you” need in order to know the truth, inherit eternal life, etc.

The purpose of this thesis is four-fold.

First, it develops a biblical basis for faith that is “radical” – with a primary emphasis on “rooted-ness”.

Second, drawing upon reading that has been done in relation to the course, *Ministry to Postmodern Generations*, it traces social, cultural, historical, political, and scientific influences that affect the present day and, more specifically, how they work to impact the work of the Church universal and the church in particular.

Third, by use of a three-part survey, it statistically evaluates the level and extent to which radical faith (orthodoxy) exists among the respondents in a given sample group. The majority of the respondents are from Chiltonville Congregational Church. The survey is designed to gain a sense of where the church people are in their “situatedness” with reference to the Gospel and, based on the results of the survey, suggestions regarding the focus and direction of the life of the church are made in this section.

Fourth, a practical tool for encouraging and assisting people to enter more deeply into their walk of faith, entitled *Bird's Eye View of the Bible* is presented and explained.

Chapters 2 and 3 of RADICAL FAITH are comprised largely of this author's first and second year doctor of ministry projects.

PROJECT – YEAR #1 – *Essential Faith* (Chapter 3) — This project identifies what is essential to Christian faith – what cannot be compromised in order to be rightly called Christian. It entails the development and analysis of a survey, with resulting practical recommendations.

PROJECT – YEAR #2 – *Foundational Faith* (Chapter 2) — This project involves developing a biblical basis and understanding of the foundations of faith. Rather than see faith in a manner that is staid and static, it views Christian faith in a way that is alive and dynamic. In addition, the Year #2 project interacts with the subject

matter based on course work reading and addresses the pre-mod-post continuum through the lens of science.

Chapter 4 of RADICAL FAITH is *Bird's Eye View of the Bible*.

The title of this thesis is a work in progress that has developed over time. *Essential Faith* (Year #1 project) endeavored to bring to the surface what is essential to a proper understanding of Christian faith. This benefits the unbeliever by enabling such a person to know what Christianity actually is and to make judgments and choices based on that knowledge. A second benefit of *Essential Faith* is that it provides boundaries for the Church today - points of basic and essential agreement that can unite the Church universal. It helps to establish the identity of the people of God. It builds the body of Christ by holding up those things that unite rather than to give emphasis to those things that distinguish and separate those who comprise the community of faith.

Foundational Faith (Year #2 project) grew out of a concern that Christian faith not be determined in a strictly subjective manner based on religious tradition or interpretive preference. It seeks to answer the question, "What is essential faith based or founded upon?" In answering this question, it became clear that a broader and deeper understanding of "foundations" was coming to light. This discovery takes RADICAL FAITH beyond the realm of foundationalism and moves it into the realm of that which is radical.

The word radical is defined as follows:

- **Arising from or going to a root or source**; basic: *proposed a radical solution to the problem.*

- Departing markedly from the usual or customary; extreme: *radical opinions on education.*

- Favoring or effecting fundamental or revolutionary changes in current practices, conditions, or institutions: *radical political views.*

- Linguistics. *Of or being a root: a radical form.*

- Botany. *Arising from the root or its crown: radical leaves.*

- Slang. Excellent; wonderful.¹ (this author's emphasis)

In the term RADICAL FAITH, “radical” refers to the rooted-ness of faith that is essential and foundational to a vital, dynamic, lived-out Christian faith and spirituality.

On a personal note, this thesis is significant to this author because of his personal faith journey. (see Appendix 1).

SETTING

The setting for this thesis is the local church – the Chiltonville Congregational Church (CCC) in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Founded in 1814 as 4th Parish of Plymouth, the church historically marks its beginnings in the Second Great Awakening. The name was changed in 1892. CCC is the ninth church to stem from the Church of the Plymouth Pilgrims. Its meetinghouse, built in 1840, reflects the traditional architecture of the day. The church's roots are in orthodoxy, which was articulated clearly in its life and documents. As the 19th century drew to a close, the church began to move away from its orthodox position and became more civic and social in nature. For a variety of reasons, the church struggled to survive, spiritually

¹ <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=radical>

and financially. Church records indicate that the church seemed to “exist for the purpose of its Sunday School”. As the 20th century unfolded, the church maintained its place at the heart of the small community. It was a place where rites of passage took place as well as a place of religious instruction. It continued to be a living, faith community not so much because of its pastoral leadership, but on account of a dedicated core group of committed members. In 1975, the church adopted a team-ministry concept, employing one team coordinator along with 3 to 4 other participants at different times. Team members were otherwise employed for their main livelihood. They assumed pastoral responsibilities on a rotating basis. Spiritually, the church became very broad with ministers that were Unitarian (Christian), Unitarian (Universalist), Congregational, and Methodist. Even within the denominational affiliations represented there were significant theological differences. In 1998, with the death of the ministry team leader, the church decided to go back to having a settled pastor. This author was called to the pastorate at the Chiltonville Congregational Church in January 2000. This doctoral thesis is in direct consequence of the ministry that is currently unfolding at CCC.

The local, gathered church is the proper setting for the work represented in this thesis. The church is vital when it comes to the matter of spiritual interaction with the world, providing the benefit of a faith community where people can find inspiration, comfort, instruction, fellowship, and opportunities to serve. For that reason, people with a developing postmodern mindset find the community offered by the church today increasingly important. The local church is also important in that it is a “sending-out” agency. The temptation for the church to exist in and for itself must be resisted actively. At times, the church has been referred to as “Fort

Chiltonville”, conveying the sense that it is a place of refuge and protection from hostile forces as well as a place out of which those equipped and prepared to engage in spiritual development and spiritual warfare can be sent. Thus, in concept, analysis, and practical application, this thesis is a contribution to the work of God in this time and place.

CHAPTER TWO

Theological Framework and Literature Review

Chapter 2 of this thesis explains the meaning and nature of “radical” faith. The term “radical” refers to rootedness rather than to that which is extreme or outlandish. In the movement of thought from ‘Essential Faith’ to ‘Foundational Faith’, the progression is toward an understanding of faith that is ‘Radical’. The term speaks to something that is more than “cast in stone” or immovable. Instead, it is alive, dynamic, active, and life-giving. It serves as both source and substance for something more than itself.

OBJECTIVES

The first objective of this chapter is to lay out a biblical and dynamic understanding of Radical Faith to show that it is quite different than foundationalism or fundamentalism. In looking at the theological understanding in the church, both historically and in the present day, it is easy to see the ends of the spectrum, one being established and static and the other being dynamic and always evolving. On one end, the more conservative church seeks to establish the truth of Scripture, evidenced most pointedly in the battle over “inerrancy”, at the expense of being dynamic. On the other end, the more liberal church aims to be socially and experientially dynamic at the expense of being Scriptural. This chapter offers a third alternative that moderates the extremes and presents a meaningful alternative.

A second objective of this chapter is to view the continuum from the premodern

to the modern to the postmodern era through the lens of science drawing upon literature from the Doctor of Ministry track *Ministry to Postmodern Generations*. The intent is to trace the manner in which truth was seen and understood in each of the respective eras (pre-mod-post), the premise being that by understanding how the world conceives of truth, the Church/church is better able to respond to it.

An overarching influence on this thesis in general and this chapter in particular is the manner in which the Evangelical church has embraced and adopted the thinking and *modus operandi* of modernity. The Evangelical church has allowed modernity to dictate the terms and the battleground upon which the Church engages the world, the culture, and society theologically, historically, socially, politically, academically, and scientifically. Dr. David Wells in *No Place for Truth* writes that “the way we think is the product of the society in which we live.”² In comparing and contrasting modernity and postmodernity, this discussion will be translated into the way it has been reflected in the church.

A third objective of this chapter is to propose a new view that avoids the pitfalls of modernity and the epistemological shortcomings of postmodernism and then to advocate for an understanding of truth that is characterized by dynamic-tension as opposed to a mechanistic, modern approach or a postmodern view of truth which is relative, referential, and rootless. The thrust of this thesis comes out of a desire to develop ways that the church can speak to and reach out to people in the postmodern era. The Church today is very critical of postmodernism. This being the case, it must support both thinking and acting in the light of the postmodernist reality

² *No Place for Truth*, David F. Wells – Eerdmans – 1994 – p. 72.

that is which increasingly evidenced in the world. Postmoderns are people, created in God's image and loved by him. As the object(s) of God's affection, he seeks them with an ever-reaching love, which is personified and conveyed in and through the Person and work of Jesus Christ and incarnated in the Church. The challenge for the Church/church today is to communicate that love in a way that is effective and meaningful. There needs to be a new emphasis on the content of the message, delivered in the context of the present day which is attested to by all that believers think, say, and do.

BIBLICAL OVERVIEW - A LOOK AT THE "FOUNDATIONS"

In the Old Testament, the idea of a foundation is that which is "laid down". While a building was sometimes set upon the surface of the soil or rock, which had been leveled either by excavation or by filling up with small stones, a true foundation was "laid down".³ This is conveyed in Isaiah 28:16:

*So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure **foundation**; the one who trusts will never be dismayed..." (NIV³)*

Much attention was paid to foundations on the strength of which depended the durability of the upper walls; the better buildings had basic layers of stone set out either as a complete foundation course or to support the corners.⁴ The Hebrew **yāsad** means 'to fix firmly, found', a word used generally of all types of foundations.

² *The New Bible Dictionary* – Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. – Grand Rapids, MI – 19673 - p. 439.

³ *The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV)* – Zondervan – 1973, 1978, 1984.

⁴ *Ibid* – *New Bible Dictionary* – p. 439

Metaphorically, it denotes anything immovably established, as the earth⁴:

Psalm 24:1,2:

*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he **founded** it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. (NIV)*

Isaiah 24:18:

*Whoever flees at the sound of terror will fall into a pit; whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare. The floodgates of the heavens are opened, the **foundations** of the earth shake. (NIV)*

Yāsad indicates an immovable base on which a solid structure can be erected. In the Old Testament, most uses of this family of words are metaphorical. A literal foundation is, among other things, spoken of in reference to Solomon's palace (1 Kings 7:10) the temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 5:17; 2 Chronicles 3:3; Ezra 3:10, 11, 12; Isaiah 44:28; Haggai 2:18; Zechariah 4:9; 8:9), the city of Jericho (Joshua 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34), the nation of Egypt (Exodus 9:18) and the earth (Job 38:4; Psalm 104:5; Proverbs 3:19; 8:29; Isaiah 24:18; 48:13; 51:13, 16; Zechariah 12:1). To affirm that in the beginning God "laid the foundations of the earth" (Psalm 102:25) is to say that God established the universe and the unchangeable laws by which it operates.⁵

The New Testament uses, primarily, three groups of words in reference to "foundations". They are **themelios** (Θεμελιος) - also themeleios or themelion, **Katabole** (καταβολε), and **Ktisis** (κτιστις).

Themelios (Θεμελιος) is properly an adjective belonging to a foundation,

⁴ Ibid – *New Bible Dictionary* – p. 439

⁵ *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* – Lawrence O. Richards – Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI – 1985 – p. 292

connected with **tithemi** (τιθεμι), to place. It is used as a noun, with **lithos** (λιθος), a stone, understood in Luke 6 in the story where Jesus teaches about the man who built his house on rock.⁶

Luke 6:47-49:

*I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the **foundation** on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a **foundation**. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete. (NIV)*

Themeleios (Θεμελιος) is used in the Old Testament, literal sense of the word in Hebrews 1:10 (quoting Psalm 102:25-27):

*He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the **foundations** of the earth and the heavens are the work of your hands..." (NIV)*

*...you **founded** the earth... (NRSV⁷)*

*...hast laid the **foundation** of the earth... (KJV⁸)*

The verb **themelioo** means to lay a foundation or to found. It is used metaphorically⁹ in Ephesians 3:17:

⁶ *Vines Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* – Word Bible Publishers, Opwa Falls, Iowa – Fleming H. Revell Co. – 1981 – p. 128.

⁷ *The New Revised Standard Version Bible* – American Bible Society - 1989

⁸ *King James Version (KJV)* – public domain - from Biblegateway.com - matches 1987 printing

⁹ Ibid – Vines – p. 128.

*...And I pray that you, being rooted and **established** in love... (NIV).*

and in Colossians 1:23:

*...if you continue in your faith **established** and firm... (NIV).*

and again in 1 Peter 5:10:

*And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and **steadfast**. (NIV)*

Like its Hebrew counterpart, *yāsad*, *themeleios* means that which lies beneath, foundation (stone), base – in the literal sense (e.g. foundations of a house, city, or building).

The initial understanding of “foundations” is that they are not “laid down” by happenstance, but with foresight, intent, and purpose. This connects the terms “foundation” and “creation” in reference to an act by which something that has not previously existed in this (particular) form is brought into being.¹⁰ These foundations are not secure in themselves, but are laid by God and are capable of being destroyed again:

Deuteronomy 32:22:

*For fire has been kindled by my wrath, one that burns to the realm of death below. It will devour the earth and its harvests and set afire the **foundations** of the mountains. (NIV)*

Lamentations 4:11:

The Lord has given full vent to his wrath; he has poured out his fierce anger. He

¹⁰ *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 1 – Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI – Colin Brown, General Editor – 1967 – seventh printing 1982 – p. 376.

*kindled a fire in Zion that consumed her **foundations**. (NIV)*

Psalm 18:7, 15:

*The earth trembled and quaked, and the **foundations** of the mountains shook;
the trembled because he was angry. (NIV)*

*The valleys of the sea were exposed and the **foundations** of the earth laid bare at
your rebuke, O Lord. (NIV)*

The stability of this world is not an immanent possession of her own, but results from an act of foundation that is wrapped in mystery and so remains a gift from God.¹¹

Beyond *yāsad*, *themeleios* speaks in terms of philosophical thought, where the term means the basis of a system.¹² When the Old Testament refers to a basis and foundation, it is never in the Greek, philosophical sense of ultimate, self-sufficient existence.¹³ In addressing the cost of discipleship, Jesus also stresses the importance of a foundation in Luke 14:28-30:

*Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? For if he lays the **foundation** and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, “This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.” (NIV)*

The writer of Hebrews goes on to highlight the importance of foundations in speaking about Abraham’s quest in response to God’s call in Hebrews 11:10:

*For he was looking forward to the city with **foundations**, whose architect and builder is God. (NIV)*

¹¹ Ibid – *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* – p. 661.

¹² Ibid – *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* – p. 660.

¹³ Ibid – *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* – p. 661.

In the Greek there are two additional groups of words which expand the meaning of “foundations.” In both cases the terms can have many different shades of meaning, which vary according to context. **Katabole** (καταβολε) refers primarily to foundation, and thus can mean beginning, that which gives something direction and determination.¹⁴ In addition to, literally, “a casting down”, *katabole* is also used of conceiving seed.¹⁵ In Hebrews 11:11, *katabole* is linked with *spermato*s (seed) and means laying or depositing seed, i.e. begetting:

*By faith he (Abraham) received power of **procreation**, even though he was too old – and Sarah herself was barren – because he considered him faithful who had promised. (NRSV).*

*By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled **to become a father** because he considered him faithful who had made the promise. (NIV).*

Note: the NIV also gives the following alternative – Or *By faith even Sarah, who was past age, was enabled **to bear children** because she... Through faith also Sarah herself received strength **to conceive seed**, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.*

God as the Creator lays the foundations with intention a purpose. They find their security only in the Creator and not in and of themselves. When God’s free activity is dated before this point in time (*pro kataboles kosmou*) as in John 17:24:

*Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the **creation** of the*

¹⁴ Ibid – *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* – p. 376.

¹⁵ Ibid – *Vines* – p. 128.

world (NIV), where the object of God's love is Jesus, and in Ephesians 1:4:

*For he chose us in him before **the creation** of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. (NIV)*, where the object is the believer. The purpose is to declare the independence of God's providence from history and from the absolute beginning which he himself set. This independence enables him to break into history in his loving purposes and to bring the course of history to its completion, again in his love.¹⁶

Finally, Matthew 13:35 (quoting Psalm 78:2), Hebrews 9:26 and 1 Peter 1:20 (cf. John 17:24) refer to the unique, central position of Jesus Christ in the history of salvation.

*So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the **creation** of the world." (NIV)*

*Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the **creation** of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Hebrews 9:26 (NIV).*

Jesus Christ reveals in the midst of history what has been hidden since the foundation of the world, and thus fixes the end of time.¹⁷

Ktisis (κτισις), originally foundation, describes in a broad sense rather the process of becoming and coming into being, resulting from a decision of the will. But it also goes beyond the meaning of **katabole** and denotes the result of such an act, the created thing as an entity. Although both groups of words are represented in the New Testament, the **ktisis** (ktisis or ktizo) group is used much more in biblical

¹⁶ Ibid – *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* – p. 377.

¹⁷ Ibid – *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* – p. 378.

statements about God's creative activity, both with regard to existence in general and as it concerns faith in particular.¹⁸

The New Testament emphasis of the Greek words is less on immovability of what has been established than it is on the act of founding.¹⁹ What is important in the New Testament is the point of beginning. Paul's role as an expert builder, laying the foundation of the church in Corinth, is as the evangelist who first brought the gospel²⁰:

1 Corinthians 3:10-13:

*By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any **foundation** other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. (NIV)*

In Ephesians 2:19-22:

*Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the **foundation** of the apostles and the prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (NIV).*

¹⁸ Ibid – *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* – p. 376.

¹⁹ Ibid – *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* – p. 293.

²⁰ Ibid - *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* – p. 293.

The reference to the church as “built on the foundation of the apostles in no way suggests that the apostles have replaced Jesus as the unshakeable base of Christian faith (1 Corinthians 3:11). Rather, Paul reminds us believers that the church had its origins in the ministry that the apostles had after Jesus’ resurrection.²¹

More than seeing foundations as simply the basis of the universe and the world (likened Scripturally to the proper base of a tower or a building), they are seen as a creative, life-giving and vital entity that is divine in its origin and initiative. Christ is the foundation of faith and in the power of the resurrection, that foundation is fully alive. It is the unshakeable, completely dependable foundation upon which the apostles and Christ’s disciples, through the ages, build.

The crowning realization of a biblical understanding of foundations comes in knowing that the foundations serve as the base of a spiritual building (see Ephesians 2:20 above) - a temple not made with hands, but comprised of living stones: Hebrews 9:11:

*When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through **the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made**, that is to say, not part of this creation. (NIV) (author’s emphasis).*

1 Corinthians 3:16:

Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? (NIV).

1 Peter 2:4:

As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and

²¹ Ibid - *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* – p. 293.

precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (NIV) (author’s emphasis).

A biblical understanding of foundations cannot afford to overlook the intent and purpose of God in creation. Eden was the perfect environment in which to cultivate the perfect relationship. As a result of the Fall, both the creation and the creature (humankind) have been negatively affected by the reality of sin. However, God’s intention and purpose remain, and he continues to reach out in love building upon the foundations that have already been established in Christ before the world began – that the world might not be condemned through him, but be saved.²² Jesus came (John 10:10) *that we might have life and have it “to the full” (NIV) or “abundantly” (NRSV).*

THE ELEMENTS OF RADICAL FAITH

Having established the nature and scope of ‘foundations’, the question remains, “What in fact are the ‘foundations’ that are found in Scripture?” Hebrews 6:1,2 provides a biblical overview of the basic elements of Christian faith:

*Therefore let us leave the elementary teaching (**logos**) about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying (down) (**kataballomenoi**) again the foundation (**themelion**) of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (NIV).*

²² John 3:17 – *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (NIV)*

The six fundamental doctrines mentioned are:

1. *Repentance* - the change of mind that causes one to turn away from sin and/or useless rituals. (NIV footnote - “death” = or *from useless rituals*).
2. *Faith in God* - the counterpart of repentance. As repentance is turning away from the darkness of sin, faith is turning to the light of God.
3. *Instruction about baptisms* - a reference to different baptisms with which the readers are familiar, such as Jewish baptism of proselytes, John the Baptist’s baptism, and the baptism commanded by Jesus (Matthew 28:19).
4. *Laying on of hands* - sometimes followed baptism (Acts 8:16-17; 19:5-6). Otherwise laying on of hands was practiced in connection with ordaining or commissioning (see Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Timothy 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6), healing the sick (see Mark 6:5; 16:18; Luke 4:40; Acts 28:8) and bestowal of blessing (see Matthew 19:13-15).
5. *Resurrection of the dead* - the resurrection of all people in the last days (see John 5:25-29; 11:25; 2 Corinthians 4:14).
6. *Eternal judgment* - the destiny of those who reject God’s saving grace and persist in their sinful ways.²³ (Huges and Burdick – NIV Study Bible).

This list is far from being exhaustive, but it is the place to begin. R. C. Lenski comments that: All these things are the elements, the ABC’s of Christianity.²⁴

Four items taken from the start of the Christian life and two from its

²³*The NIV Study Bible* - Zondervan Publishing House - Grand Rapids, MI - 1985 - p. 1864 – Hebrews contributors, Philip E. Huges and Donald W. Burdick.

²⁴*The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James* - Augsburg Publishing House - Minneapolis, MN - 1966 - p. 176.

consummation at the last day serve for summarizing the foundation of Christianity, which it should not be necessary to lay again for the readers of this letter.²⁵

The reason that these items are included in what is considered 'elementary' is because - Almost every item in this list had a place in an orthodox Jewish community. He may have felt that to concentrate on this area would be of no help to those slipping back into Judaism. Therefore he goes on to "solid food."²⁶

There is some question as to who the author's audience is in Hebrews 6. Is this a reference to the earliest Christian catechism? If so, does it presuppose readers whose background was paganism or Judaism? And what does each item connote in the way of teaching?

By definition - **the elementary doctrines of Christ** - it is Christian teaching, although each item taken by itself, out of the context, could be discussed without any specific Christian context. It can hardly be a summary of an entire catechism, for that must have included teaching about Jesus as the Christ. On the whole, the evidence favors the supposition of Gentile rather than Jewish readers.²⁷

The question of audience is important, not because the elementary doctrines are specifically Jewish or Gentile in nature, but Christian, thus addressing and therein unifying the two groups.

The question remains - If Hebrews 6:1,2 refers to the elementary teachings of Christian faith, is there a reference to the Person and place of Jesus Christ as the

²⁵ Ibid - *Epistle to the Hebrews* - Lenski - p. 178

²⁶ *NIV Bible Commentary* - Kenneth L. Barker & John Kohlenberger III consulting editors - Zondervan Publishing House - Grand Rapids, MI - Vol. 2 New Testament - 1994 - p. 963.

²⁷ *The Interpreter's Bible* - Abingdon Press - New York, Nashville - Vol. XI - copyright 1955 - p. 650

central figure, indeed the Center, of Christian faith? To answer this question, it is helpful to draw heavily from the work of Dr. Robert Webber as he outlines the meaning and significance of “the Rule of Faith.”

Authority in the early church is located in the apostles. These original interpreters of the faith passed the faith down through oral preaching and teaching, through the written gospel accounts and letters, and through the appointment of their successors, the bishops. Consequently, apostolic tradition and succession emerged in the late second century as the apologetic for the preservation and the handing down of truth. About the same time the “rule of faith” emerged in cities all over the empire. This “rule” was regarded as a summary of the salient features of the Christian faith, a framework for the essential truths confessed by those who stood in the tradition of the apostolic teachings. During this time the writings of the apostles were collected and affirmed as authoritative by the Council of Carthage in A.D. 457. These books had been recognized over a long period of time and affirmed in the Church because of their apostolic origins (either written by an apostle or under the authority of an apostle) and because of *consensus fideum*, their acceptance in worship by the faithful.

Once the canon of Scripture had been declared, the Church began its search for an authoritative interpretation. There were three schools of interpretation: the literalists from the Antiochene school, who used the grammatical-historical and theological method; the allegorists from the Alexandrian school of thought, who looked for a literal, moral, and spiritual meaning in each passage; and the typologists, who represented the approach of most of the church fathers. The typologists emphasized the types and shadows of the Old Testament that were

fulfilled in the New Testament, particularly those clustered around the exodus event as a type of the Christ event. Then, in A.D. 450, Vincent of Lérins suggested in his *Commonitory* that those interpretations are valid that meet the criteria of antiquity, universality, and consensus: the classical view of authority was established – **apostolic authority expressed in the rule of faith**, in the apostolic writings, and the interpretation that **was characterized by antiquity, universality, and consensus.**²⁸ (this author's emphasis).

Webber continues by saying that part of the (postmodern) apologetic task is to reconstruct this development in search of the apostolic faith and practice that was “handed over” to the next generation. In broad strokes the unfolding of authority may be outlined as follows:

1. The authority of the Christian faith is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.
2. The church was given the responsibility of handing Jesus Christ over from generation to generation.
3. The apostles were faced with the immediate responsibility of interpreting Christ and handing down the truth about Jesus accurately.
4. The context in which Jesus was interpreted was in the worship of the church. The primitive Christian hymns, creeds, doxologies, benedictions, catechetical literature, and apostolic interpretations contained the recognized apostolic traditions (liturgical epistemology).
5. The Scriptures were written for the church and were to be read in worship. They contain the authoritative accounts of Christ together with the apostolic

²⁸ *Ancient-Future Faith* – Robert E. Webber – Baker Books – Grand Rapids, MI – 1999 – p. 178.

interpretations of Christ. Thus, Scripture is tradition; that is, it hands over Jesus Christ.

6. Summaries of faith such as the rule of faith and the ecumenical creeds are more specific reflections on apostolic teaching and practice. The church fathers were not creating something new. Rather, they were writing summaries of faith that were true to the actual original tradition, teaching, and faith of the catholic Church, which the Lord conferred, the apostles proclaimed, and the Fathers guarded.²⁹

The faith of the church, from the earliest times, has been characterized by a specific content. It is a recognizable body of truth.³⁰

What was true in the New Testament period was equally true in second century. The picture of the church at the end of the 2nd century is that of a number of churches around the major cities of Rome, Carthage, Alexandria, Jerusalem, and Antioch united under their bishops, similar in worship, and grounded in the teachings of the apostles as summarized in the “**rule of faith**”.³¹

This summary of the Christian faith that emerged with clarity in the 2nd century is not theology but what can be aptly term “**a biblical framework of thought.**” That is to say, the contents of biblical or historic Christianity set forth the necessary presuppositions from which Christian thinking proceeds. Consequently, the content of the rule of faith was a summary of revelation: the apostles summarized the essence of revelation and passed it on. This “biblical framework” defined the perimeters within which the Christian Church did its thinking. It was the *regula fidei*

²⁹Ibid- *Ancient-Future Faith* - Webber - p. 181.

³⁰Ibid - *Ancient-Future Faith* - p. 182.

³¹Ibid - *Ancient-Future Faith* - p. 182.

(regulation of faith).³²

Why is it then that this “rule of faith” needed to be developed? The answer to this question lies in recognizing the challenges that confronted the early Church - challenges not unlike those that confront the church today. In each case, the church clarified the rule of faith by articulating the soundness of doctrine in terms relevant to the culture and to the challenge offered.

Although Christianity began to be tested in the New Testament period by Judaism and religious ideas from Egypt and Persia, its most significant challenge came from Gnosticism, which claimed to have a superior knowledge handed down in a secret tradition. It taught, basically:

- the existence of two Gods – the Spirit God who was responsible for the good and the Creator God (often identified with Yahweh in the Old Testament) who was responsible for evil.

- because the evil God was the creator, matter was regarded as evil.

- the human body was looked upon as the prison of a person’s soul.

- salvation was the release of the soul from the body so it could ultimately be united with the good Spirit God.

- to accomplish this, the spirit God sent Christ, an emanation, to bring knowledge (*gnosis*) that would free the soul from the body.

- this knowledge, which Christ gave to the disciples, the Gnostics declared, was what one needed to know how to be saved

- this knowledge, which Christ gave to the disciples, the Gnostics declared, was

³² Ibid – *Ancient-Future Faith* – p.191.

what one needed to know to be saved.³³

Gnosticism is in the present day in the form of Christian Science and much of the New Age religious thinking. In the second century, Marcion argued that there were two Gods represented in Scripture, a tenet that is a part of the Gnostic doctrine as well. Tertullian opposed Marcion and the resulting dialogue between the two is voluminous. Tertullian is of particular significance because of a rule of faith (quoted by Robert Webber) that he wrote about A.D. 200:

We believe one only God, who has a Son, his Word who proceeded from himself, by whom all things were made; he was sent by the Father into a virgin, and was born of her, man and God, Son of man and Son of God, named Jesus Christ; he suffered, died, was buried, according to the Scriptures; was raised again by the Father; and taken back to heaven; and sits at the Father's right hand; who will come to judge the living and dead; who thereafter, according to his promises, has sent from the Father the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the sanctifier of the faith of those who believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.³⁴

Webber summarizes:

by the end of the second century the church had an *authoritative source* and an *authoritative summary* of what the church believed and taught. The authoritative source was the apostles. They had received their message from Christ and passed it on in the church. Both oral and written traditions of the apostles, which they had transmitted to the church and which the church had received and guarded and passed on, were the authoritative "rule of faith." This rule was regarded as key to the

³³Ibid - *Ancient-Future Faith* - p. 183.

³⁴Tertullian, *Adversus Praxean*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, as "Against Praxeas" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), III, 597-627)

interpretation of the Christian faith, a framework of thought for all to follow.

Eventually, the rule of faith became universally summarized in the Apostle's Creed.³⁵

Rule of faith was a part of the fabric and life of the early Church and that of the church fathers. Clarifying the rule of faith became necessary in the face of heretical challenges to Christianity. Postmodernism offers its own challenge to Christian by treating all truth claims as equally valid. Postmodern thinking operates on the basis of some kind of "special knowledge" that enables us to know how those truth claims intermingle and mesh. There is even an inclination to understand such knowledge in spiritual terms, making it more nebulous and vague. Such a redefinition of truth leaves one open to any and all types of distortions that, if allowed, will certainly find a place.

Churches in the Reformed tradition align under the Reformation banner of *Sola Scriptura*. How then does rule of faith stand in relation to the beloved Canon? Webber asserts that "Because the rule of faith was formed at the same time that the apostolic writings were being collected, **it precedes the scriptural canon** (emphasis mine) in time and functions as the key to the interpretation of Scripture."³⁶ His argument is:

we are speaking of the *faith* (noun), not the act of faith (verb). Paul referred to this body of doctrine as the "gospel," the "pattern of sound words," and the "truth" (2 Timothy 1:11-18). This is the truth taught by Jesus, transmitted by the apostles, and received by the Church.³⁷

Paul's "doxology" in Philippians 2:1-11, his introduction to the words of institution

³⁵Ibid - *Ancient-Future Faith* - p. 184

³⁶Ibid - *Ancient-Future Faith* - p. 185

³⁷Ibid - *Ancient-Future Faith* - p. 191.

in 1 Corinthians 11:23, and his creedal statement in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 are of particular importance. The (beautiful) literary form of Philippians 2:1-11 has led many to regard it as an early Christian hymn that Paul incorporated into his letter.³⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:23 and 15:3-5 stand out because of specific phraseology indicating that they predate the writing of the letter. 1 Corinthians 11:23 states, *What I received from the Lord I also passed on to you* (NIV). 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 begins, *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance* (NIV). The doctrines and theology mentioned did not originate with Paul or with the letter to Corinth. The doctrinally central place of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15) and the theology and practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11) did not originate with Paul.

The upshot of this consideration is to see the place and importance of the historic creeds (the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Chalcedon Creed) in light of the manner and extent to which they reflect not only the Scriptures, but the rule of faith and the tradition handed down by the church. Webber offers a note of caution and perspective -

the genius of the creedal formations is *that they did not elevate the methodology or the final theological form as truth in and of itself. Instead, the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian definition pointed to the truth contained in Scriptures and summarized in the rule of faith as ultimately beyond the possibility of being captured in a compr-hensive form .In other words, the creeds wrote a negative theology.*³⁹

Concluding this section and transitioning to the next will be accomplished by outlining three models for understanding truth. 1) Foundationalism is a view about

³⁸NIV Bible Commentary - p. 797.

³⁹Ibid - Ancient-Future Faith - p. 198.

the structure of knowledge. It envisages solid foundations driven into bedrock and a sound structure erected thereon ranging over the most fundamental facts and principles, the most detailed understanding and the most embracing generalizations.⁴⁰ This is an attractive picture for any number of reasons, not least of which is its appeal to familiar metaphors such as the structure of a multi-story building, the links of a chain or the steps of a ladder.⁴¹ Foundationalism is philosophically what fundamentalism is theologically. The model of an immovable foundation is typical of a modern mind set which understands truth as functioning within a closed system. It also sees such knowledge as knowable even if it is yet to be discovered. The foundation is set in stone. 2) Postmodernism does not embrace the concept of ultimate or absolute truth. It is characterized by totality and fluidity. Postmodernism rejects the idea of absolute or ultimate truth. It contends that the various truths that exist are dependent on other existing truths, therefore, no one truth is foundational, absolute, or ultimate, because they are all relative to one another. The corresponding, postmodern model is that of a place mat that is web of interwoven strands. It has not “foundation” per se. Its substance and strength comes out of its interconnectedness - one truth relative to any and all others. 3) The third model is scriptural. It is that of a tree. Such a model goes beyond a rigid foundation. In the biblical sense of the word, foundations are not limited to stones, but extend to that which is life-giving and involves being. To be “radical” is synonymous with being “grounded”, which indicates that the metaphor of a tree is a more accurate corollary. A tree has roots, and those roots, most assuredly, serve as the tree’s foundation and anchor.

⁴⁰ “*Foundationalism, Skepticism, Coherentism*” – Robert Bass – Bowling Green Univ. – p.1
<http://personal.bgsu.edu/~roberth/coherence.html>

⁴¹ Ibid – “*Foundationalism, Skepticism, Coherentism*” – p.1.

But more than this, the roots are the source of life to the tree, transmitting life-giving sap to the branches, which in turn produce fruit (John 15). The parallel continues between the foundation of a building and the roots of a tree when seeing that both are pruned or trimmed – one by fire –

1 Corinthians 3:12:

If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he builds survives, he will receive a reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss... (NIV).

And the other by the “gardener” –

John 15:1,2:

I am the vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. (NIV)

In both cases, the motivation is the same, namely to maximize the yield. In the one instance, that yield is a reward, and in the other, that of fruit.

In summary, the elementary teachings of Christ (Hebrews 6), the things passed on from Christ as of first importance (1 Corinthians 11 and 15), the rule of faith, and a canonical framework of faith combine to comprise “radical faith.” It is a faith that is dynamic rather than static, a live orthodoxy as opposed to a dead religiosity, one that has the power of true religion and not merely the form of it. (2 Timothy 3:5).

SCIENCE AS A LENS TO THE PRE-MOD-POST CONTINUUM

The pre-mod-postmodern continuum can be traced academically, architecturally, and artistically, but it is perhaps most clearly reflected in science. In many ways, science drives the progression toward postmodernism as a result of the worldview assumptions that operate within the framework of scientific truth that are then translated into the culture as a whole. For instance, the scientific assumptions that led Columbus to seek a new trade route to India and that motivated Copernicus to postulate a heliocentric solar system fueled the movement toward the science of Galileo, Newton, and Bacon - and to modernity. Similarly, the work of Max Planck, Albert Einstein, Niels Bohr, and Louis de Broglie in the beginning of the 20th century paved the way for the new science of today and the corresponding paradigm shift that accompanies it.

The Enlightenment inaugurated the modern era. It was preceded by the premodern era, including the medieval and ancient periods. Although the premodern era possessed a wide variety of ideas, there were several that are at its core including a belief in the rationality of the universe and that observable nature was not the whole of reality.⁴²

The Premodern Era:

- believed in the supernatural
- individuals and the culture as a whole believed in God (or gods)
- life in the world owed its existence and meaning to a spiritual realm beyond the senses.
- it included mythological paganism and classical rationalism, as well

⁴²*Postmodernizing the Faith* - Millard J. Erickson - Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI - 1998 - p. 15

as biblical revelation.⁴³

The premodern understanding of reality was teleological. The understanding was that there was a purpose or purposes in the universe, within which humans fit and were to be understood. The purpose was being worked out within the world. In the Western tradition, this was evidenced in the belief that an omnipotent, omniscient God had created the entire universe and the human race, and had a plan that he was bringing about. There had to be reasons for things, and these were not only limited to efficient or “because of” causes, but also included final or “in order that” causes.⁴⁴

There were definite metaphysical and epistemological conceptions involved in premodernism. There was a basic belief in the objective existence of the physical world. There also was a belief in a correspondence theory of truth: propositions are true if they correctly describe the realities they purport to describe, false if they do not. This is closely wrapped up with a referential understanding of language. Language does not simply refer to other language, but to something extra-linguistic.⁴⁵

In the premodern era, Christian assumptions - often shared by classical rationalism and even paganism - acquired a special authority.

- Most people assumed that God is real and must be taken into account.
- Good is in conflict with evil.
- Human beings are sinful, yet they are valuable and the objects of God's salvation.
- Nature is God's creation, but there is a reality beyond nature - the realm of the

⁴³ *Postmodern Times* - Gene Edward Veith - Crossway Books, a division of Good New Publishers, Wheaton, IL - 1994 - p. 28

⁴⁴ *Ibid* - *Postmodernizing the Faith* - p. 15

⁴⁵ *Ibid* - *Postmodernizing the Faith* - p. 15

spirit, the source of all values and the true destiny of human beings.

- Neither humanity nor society nor nature is autonomous. All are utterly dependent upon God.⁴⁶

The Modern Era:

Modernism held a several things in common with premodernity:

- belief in metaphysical realism
- the correspondence view of truth
- the referential theory of language.
- it also held that there was a discernable pattern to history.⁴⁷

In time, however, thinkers began to see Christian supernaturalism as old-fashioned. Human achievements in science and technology seemed to open up a new age of progress, rendering the wisdom of past ages obsolete.⁴⁸

The historical beginning point of Modernity is a question of some importance. Gene Edward Veith cites Christian scholar Thomas Oden who maintains that the modern age lasted exactly 200 years - from the fall of the Bastille in 1789 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.⁴⁹

This kind of “dating” has value as an historical reference point, but fails to take into consideration that rigidly defined lines of demarcation between the eras (premodern, modern, postmodern) simply do not exist. The movement from one era to the next is really a continuum in which one era fades, blends, and segues into the next. Although there are many elements that are shared between premodernism and

⁴⁶Ibid - *Postmodern Times* - Gene Edward Veith - p. 32.

⁴⁷Ibid - *Postmodernizing the Faith* - p. 16

⁴⁸Ibid - *Postmodern Times* - Veith - p. 32.

⁴⁹*Postmodern Times* - Gene Edward Veith - Crossway Books - Wheaton, IL - 1994 - p. 27.

modernity, the same cannot be said of the relationship between modernity and postmodernity. Postmodernity seems to be a reaction to all that modernity is. However, as the postmodern era dawns and unfolds, there are still many elements and aspects of modernity at work.

J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh make a compelling case for the year 1492 as the beginning of modernity. The date corresponds to the discovery of the Americas by Christopher Columbus. It marks a paradigm shift in terms of the prevailing worldview. Worldview exists in order to answer to certain basic questions of existence:

Creation - where did we come from?

Fall - what is wrong with the world?

Redemption - what can we do to fix it?⁵⁰

Or, as articulated by Middleton and Walsh -

Where are we? or What is the nature of the reality in which we find ourselves?

Who are we? or What is the nature and task of human beings?

What's wrong? or How do we understand and account for evil and brokenness?

What's the remedy? or How do we find a path through our brokenness to wholeness?⁵¹

The Columbus story answers these questions outside of the premodern worldview.

It answers the question of "*Where?*" by saying that humanity inhabits a New World, the lost Eden which has now been found. It is a new world of wealth and

⁵⁰*How Now Shall We Live* - Charles Colson - Tyndale House Publishers - Wheaton, IL - 1999 - p. xiii

⁵¹*Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be* - J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh - Inter-Varsity Press - Downers Grove, IL - 1995 - p. 11.

promise that leaves behind the shackles of medieval Europe. It is a world that is ripe for the taking and that offers up its riches to those who know how to exploit them.

It answers the question of “*Who?*” by saying that Europeans are now the conquistadors, conquerors who have taken this wild land inhabited by savages and tamed it. North Americans, especially, have reaped great blessings from this promised land.

It answers the question of “*What’s wrong?*” by contending that progress has been impeded in the past by the static and hierarchical society of medieval Europe, and in the present it is further threatened by the primitiveness of the “Indians,” combined with the wildness of the continents.

It answers the question of “*What’s the remedy?*” by declaring that the people must release themselves from the social, ecclesiastical and economic shackles of Europe and conquer the peoples and lands of the Americas so we can build a progressive society.⁵²

In *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, John Dewey described the spirit of modern life in terms of four changes from the premodern period in Western history. First, modernity is no longer preoccupied with the supernatural, but rather delights in the natural, the this-worldly and the secular. Second, instead of the medieval emphasis on submission to ecclesiastical authority, “There is a growing belief in the power of individual minds, guided by methods of observation, experience and reflection, to attain truths needed for the guidance of life.” Third, the modern period is characterized by belief in progress. “The future rather than the past dominates the imagination. The Golden Age lies ahead of us not behind us.” Indeed, “Man is

⁵²Ibid - *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be* - p. 11.

capable, if he will but exercise the required courage, intelligence and effort, of shaping his own fate.” And fourth, “the patient and experimental study of nature, bearing fruit in inventions which control nature and subdue her forces to social use, is the method by which progress is made.”⁵³

It is helpful to look at others who were fueling the paradigm shift from the premodern to the modern era, making particular note of the dates of the people in question.

Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) was a Polish astronomer who developed the theory that the earth is a moving planet. He is considered the founder of modern astronomy. In Copernicus’ time, most astronomers accepted the theory the Greek astronomer Ptolemy had formulated nearly 1,400 years earlier. Ptolemy had said that the earth was at the center of the universe and was motionless. He had also stated that all the observed motions of the heavenly bodies were real and that those bodies moved in complicated patterns around the earth.⁵⁴ The premodern understanding was that the earth was the (unmoving) physical center of the universe and that, consequently, because humankind is the high point of creation, then it stands to reason that humankind is creationally the center of the universe. But, of course, humankind is tainted by sin, and so the next step in this reasoning process concludes that the Church (the company of the redeemed) as the spiritual center of the universe is the center in the truest and fullest sense. The science of Copernicus posed a threat to the prevailing ecclesiastical structure in the Church, which, as a function of the premodern worldview possessed civil as well as sacred power. It is no

⁵³Ibid - *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be* - p. 14.

⁵⁴Smith, A. Mark. "Copernicus, Nicolaus." World Book Online Reference Center. 2004. World Book, Inc. 17 Aug. 2004. <<http://www.aolsvc.worldbook.aol.com/wb/Article?id=ar132860>>.

wonder that the Church opposed Copernicus.

Copernicus could not prove his theory, but his explanation of heavenly motion was mathematically strong and was less complicated than Ptolemy's theory. By the early 1600s, such astronomers as Galileo in Italy and Johannes Kepler in Germany began to develop the physics that would prove Copernicus' theory correct.⁵⁵

Some would mark the beginning of modernity with the invention of the telescope (or the microscope). This brings us to Galileo (1564-1642), an Italian astronomer and physicist, considered the founder of modern experimental science. Galileo designed a variety of scientific instruments. He made the first effective use of the refracting telescope to discover important new facts about astronomy. He discovered the law of falling bodies as well as the law of the pendulum. He further developed and improved the refracting telescope, though he did not invent it.⁵⁶ Galileo's scientific discoveries worked to disprove the previously held tenets or Aristotelian philosophy and Ptolemaic astronomy. Like Copernicus before him, Galileo found himself at odds with the Roman Catholic Church. Galileo's quick wit, which he often used to ridicule his opponents, earned him a number of enemies. In 1613, Galileo wrote a letter in which he tried to show that the Copernican theory was consistent with both Catholic doctrine and proper Biblical interpretation. Some of his enemies sent a copy of this letter to the inquisitors in Rome, who sought out and punished heretics—people who opposed church teachings (see Inquisition). In early 1616, Galileo was summoned to Rome for a determination on the orthodoxy of his views. Although he was cleared of charges of heresy, he was ordered not "to hold or defend"

⁵⁵Ibid - Smith, A. Mark - World Book Online Reference Center.

⁵⁶Smith, A. Mark. "Galileo." World Book Online Reference Center. 2004. World Book, Inc. 17 Aug. 2004. <<http://www.aolsvc.worldbook.aol.com/wb/Article?id=ar215300>>.

the Copernican theory. That is, he could treat the theory hypothetically but not treat it as if it were true.⁵⁷ In 1632, Galileo published his first scientific masterpiece, *The Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*. In this work, he compared the Ptolemaic-Aristotelian theory to the Copernican theory to show that the Copernican system was logically superior. Once again Galileo was summoned to Rome, this time to answer to the charge of willfully disobeying the order not "to hold or defend" Copernicus' theory. In 1633, the Inquisition found Galileo guilty of the charge, forced him to recant publicly, and sentenced him to life imprisonment.⁵⁸ Galileo lived his remaining years under house arrest in a villa in France. In spite of failing health, he was able to publish *the Discourse on Two New Sciences*, in 1638. In this work, Galileo provided both a mathematical proof of his new theory of motion and an original study of the tensile strength of materials. He died on Jan. 8, 1642.⁵⁹

Galileo's real originality lay in his approach to scientific problems. He reduced those problems to very simple terms on the basis of everyday experience and common-sense logic. Then he analyzed and resolved the problems according to simple mathematical descriptions. The success with which Galileo applied this technique to the analysis of physics, especially the physics of motion, ushered in the development of modern mathematical physics.⁶⁰ Galileo's innovation consisted in his attempt to

⁵⁷Ibid - Smith, A. Mark - "Galileo"

⁵⁸Ibid - Smith, A Mark - "Galileo"

⁵⁹Ibid - Smith, A Mark - "Galileo"

In 1979, Pope John Paul II declared that the Roman Catholic Church may have been mistaken in condemning Galileo. He instructed a church commission to study Galileo's case. In 1983, the commission concluded that Galileo should not have been condemned. In 1984, at the commission's recommendation, the church published all documents related to Galileo's trial. In 1992, Pope John Paul II publicly endorsed the commission's finding that the church had made a mistake in condemning Galileo.

⁶⁰Ibid - Smith, A Mark - "Galileo"

interpret the world from a strictly quantitative point of view. Experimentation that yields quantifiable results (i.e. numbers rather than nonnumerical qualities) became the central technique of the emerging scientific enterprise. The focus on numerical measurements gave scientists the sense that they were practitioners in a field of inquiry that produces exact and unambiguous knowledge.⁶¹ Galileo's approach to scientific problems is very important in shaping the development of modernity. That he sought to reduce complex problems to very simple terms is central. His premise was that if something that is complex is "boiled down" to its component parts and is subject, then, to the simple forces at work upon them, then, by way of "reconstruction", it is possible to determine scientific truth. This view of "reconstructing" truth carries over into other areas of modern thinking, but it stands in stark opposition to "de-constructionism", one of the basic tenets of postmodernism.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was an English philosopher, essayist, jurist, and statesman. He was one of the earliest and most influential supporters of *empirical* (experimental) science and helped develop the scientific method of solving problems.⁶² Bacon believed all previous claims to knowledge, particularly of medieval science, were doubtful because they were based on poor logic. He believed the mind makes hasty generalizations, which prevent the attainment of knowledge. But he also believed that the mind could discover truths that would enable humanity to conquer disease, poverty, and war by gaining power over nature. To discover truths, the

⁶¹A *Primer on Postmodernism* - Stanley J. Grenz - William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. - Grand Rapids, MI - 1996 p. 50.

⁶²Walton, Craig. "Bacon, Francis." World Book Online Reference Center. 2004. World Book, Inc. 17 Aug. 2004. <<http://www.aolsvc.worldbook.aol.com/wb/Article?id=ar041340>>.

human mind must rid itself of four prejudices. Bacon called these prejudices *Idols of the Mind*.

The first Idol (of the Tribe) is the tendency of general human perception to generalize too quickly. Bacon claimed that uncritical perception cannot be trusted. The second Idol (of the Cave) is the tendency of people to base a knowledge of things on individual experiences, education, and tastes. People fail to realize how variable and untrustworthy these factors can be as a basis for claims to knowledge. The third Idol (of the Market Place) results from the dependence on language to communicate. Because words are often imprecise, they may be misinterpreted. The fourth Idol (of the Theater) is the influence of previous philosophies and laws of reasoning that are merely products of imagination.

Bacon believed the mind could attain truth if it followed the *inductive method* of investigation. He developed four steps of doing so:

- (1) listing all known cases in which a phenomenon occurs
- (2) listing similar cases where the phenomenon does not occur
- (3) listing the cases in which the phenomenon occurs in differing degrees
- (4) examination of the three lists. These steps would lead to the cause of a phenomenon.⁶³

Modernity was initiated by those who held a Christian worldview. Their belief in the Creator God and an ordered universe made science possible. These beliefs became foundation stones in the structure of modernity. Rene Descartes (1596-1650) is famous for his Latin phrase “Cognito ergo sum”, *I think, therefore, I am*.

⁶³Ibid - Walton, Craig. “Bacon, Francis”

This statement was an attempt to demonstrate, philosophically, the reality of being human. His desire was to demonstrate that reality is not a function of skepticism, a deception or imagery (simply a product of the human mind). For Descartes, humanness is demonstrated in the reality of thought(s). He went on to argue that he could also clearly and distinctly perceive that an infinitely powerful and good God exists. This God would not allow Descartes to be deceived in his clearest perceptions.⁶⁴ Descartes takes us in two directions simultaneously and in so doing, he sows the seeds of modernity's demise and the rise of postmodernism and the post-Christian era. He first of all establishes the philosophical confidence that is intrinsic to modernity, which later, postmodernity will not embrace. And he also moves modernity in a direction away from God (and its Christian roots) by defining human identity in terms of subjective thought (the intellect) rather than strictly "in the image of God." This eventuates in existentialism - the philosophy which states that the be all and end all of existence is rooted in the being and identity of man - and subsequently, leads to postmodernism. Descartes' intent was to devise an investigative method that would facilitate the discovery of those truths that were absolutely certain.⁶⁵ He began with doubt, proposing that to doubt everything, would determine that there is at least one thing that no thinking subject can doubt - namely, the subject's own existence.⁶⁶ *I think, therefore I am.* This marks a distinct shift in focus.

Throughout the modern era, intellectuals in many disciplines have turned to the

⁶⁴Nadler, Steven. "Descartes, Rene." World Book Online Reference Center. 2004. World Book, Inc. 17 Aug. 2004. <<http://www.aolsvc.worldbook.aol.com/wb/Article?id=ar155600>>.

⁶⁵Ibid - *A Primer on Postmodernism* - Grenz - p. 64.

⁶⁶Ibid - Grenz

reasoning subject rather than divine revelation as the starting point for knowledge and reflection. Even modern theologians felt constrained to build on the foundation of rationalistic philosophy.⁶⁷

Isaac Newton (1642-1727) effectively contributed the idea of a mechanistic universe in which the laws of physics work consistently throughout. He viewed the universe as a closed system. While on the one hand, such a view made science possible, on the other, it worked to eliminate the belief in the supernatural. Newton's philosophy of science and epistemology contended that knowledge is knowable. He contended that a finite, objective body of knowledge exists and it can be known regardless of whether it has, as yet, been discovered or not. In addition to the philosophy of confidence, which is intrinsic to modernity, the idea of progress, both scientific and epistemological, can be added.

Establishing the beginning of the modern era with Columbus leads us to understand that the development of modern ideas laid the groundwork for both scientific and (later) political revolution. Rather than being the beginning of modernity, the fall of the Bastille, which marked the beginning of the French Revolution, was really a result of modern forces already at work for over two centuries.

Like premoderns, modern persons were looking for all-inclusive explanations of events and of reality, but believed that this could be done without recourse to anything supernatural.⁶⁸

The great thinkers whose work heralded the dawn of the modern world were

⁶⁷Ibid

⁶⁸Ibid - *Postmodernizing the Faith* - Erickson - p. 16

Christian believers and took it for granted that theology belonged no less than physics or mathematics to the one seamless robe of truth.⁶⁹ Although modernity was rooted in a Christian worldview, in time, it began to remove God from the picture. It moved from Descartes in ascribing the power of intellect to man himself rather than from God. It moved from Newton's theological rooted-ness for the structure of the universe and the nature of creation to a merely mechanistic model. Scientific truth became the only source of truth. The process was capped by the work of Darwin whose evolutionary theory eliminated any need for God in the creational process. Man's quest for autonomy was complete. Existence could be theorized and "religified" as a matter of "Time + Matter + Chance" such that there is no need for God. Science could at that point become "scient-ism". Final causes or purposes were eliminated by modernism. They were replaced by efficient causes. Thus, events that happen in the natural order occur not because of the will of some unseen deity, but because of physical or social realities that bring them about.⁷⁰

And so, the foundations of modernity were established. Several salient features of modernism should be noted.

1. *Naturalism*. Reality is believed to be restricted to the observable system of nature. Its immanent laws are the cause of all that occurs.

2. *Humanism*. The human is the highest reality and value, the end for which all of reality exists rather than the means to the service of some higher being.

3. *The scientific method*. Knowledge is good and can be attained by humans. The method best suited for this enterprise is the scientific method, which came to

⁶⁹*The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* - Lesslie Newbigin - William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. - Grand Rapids, MI - 1989 - p. 4

⁷⁰*Ibid* - *Postmodernizing the Faith* - Erickson - p. 16.

fruition during this period. Observation and experimentation are the sources from which knowledge of truth is built.

4. *Reductionism*. From being considered the best means for gaining knowledge, the scientific method came increasingly to be considered the only method, so that various disciplines sought to attain the objectivity and precision of the natural sciences. Humans in some cases were regarded as nothing more than highly developed animals.

5. *Progress*. Because knowledge is good, humanly attainable, and growing, the problems that have beset the human race are being progressively overcome.

6. *Nature*. Rather than being fixed and static, nature came to be thought of as dynamic, growing, and developing. Thus it was able to produce the changes in life forms through immanent processes of evolution, rather than requiring explanation in terms of a creator and designer.

7. *Certainty*. Because knowledge was seen as objective, it could attain certainty.

This required foundationalism, the belief that it is possible to base knowledge on some sort of absolute first principles. One early model of this was found in the rationalism of Rene Descartes, who found one indubitable belief, namely, that he was doubting, and then proceeded to draw deductions from that. An alternative was empiricism, the belief that there are purely objective sensory data from which knowledge can be formulated.

8. *Determinism*. There was a belief that what happened in the universe followed from fixed causes. Thus, the scientific method could discover laws of regularity that controlled the universe. Not only physical occurrences but human behavior were believed to be under this etiological control.

9. *Individualism*. The ideal of the knower was the solitary individual, carefully protecting his or her objectivity by weighting all options. Truth being objective, individuals can discover it by their own efforts. They can free themselves from the conditioning particularities of their own time and place and know reality as it is in itself.

10. *Anti-authoritarianism*. The human was considered the final and most complete measure of truth. Any externally imposed authority, whether that of the group or of a supernatural being, must be subjected to scrutiny and criticism by human reason.⁷¹

Generally perceived as positivistic, technocentric, and rationalistic, universal *modernism* has been identified with the belief linear progress, absolute truths, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production.⁷²

The most obvious belief that distinguishes today's culture from all that has preceded it, in its public philosophy, is atheism. The famous reply of the French mathematician and astronomer Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749-1827) to the complaint that he had omitted God from his system - "I had no need of that hypothesis." - might stand as the motto of today's culture as a whole.⁷³ Dr. David Wells notes the displacement of the Christian understanding that has taken place. Modernity has become a kind of Christian heresy:

- the human being replaces God

⁷¹Ibid - *Postmodernizing the Faith* - Erickson - p. 16.

⁷²Ibid - Veith - *Postmodern Times* - p. 43.

⁷³<http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Science> - Reputed reply to Emperor Napoleon I, who had asked why he hadn't mentioned God in his discourse on secular variations of the orbits of Saturn and Jupiter.

- reason replaces revelation
- psychology replaces salvation
- progress replaces eschatology⁷⁴.

Like the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), modernity has sought to vie with God, to become an end in itself and to be autonomous and no longer in need of God. The builders of Babel used brick to build the tower. They took what came naturally in the created order, reformulated it, and claimed it as their own work rather than acknowledge God's creational authorship or give God the credit due his name. The modern enterprise was perhaps epitomized in the Apollo space missions which led to placing an astronaut on the moon in 1969. For those present in that decade, two events stand out - the first being when President John Kennedy was assassinated in November of 1963 - and second being when the U.S. astronauts landed on the moon. The difficulties and disasters that have beset the space program since have made many realize that much of the optimism that was generated was premature.

Psalm 11:3 asks, "If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (NRSV). Modernity did its best to replace the foundations of the premodern era with those that were rooted in that which is objective, absolute, and quantifiable. Man became the measure of truth and reality and not only was there no room for God, there was no place for God in the modern intellectual/scientific mentality. But modernity's own roots have been shaken by the new science that has unearthed truths that exceed and defy their modernist assumptions.

Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton introduced a mechanistic understanding of the world as opposed to an organic understanding. This understanding has been

⁷⁴Dr. David Wells - *Classnotes* - 20 Jan 2004 - GCTS - "Ministry to Postmodern Generations"

supplanted as a result of the “new physics.”

This picture of reality has been drastically changed by a whole series of developments in the past hundred years, including Clark Maxwell’s magnetic field theory, Einstein’s special and general relativity, quantum physics, and the recent discoveries about the fundamental structure of matter. The new physics is so different from the old that those whose minds have been shaped by the old are almost unable to grasp the new except through long and thorough training.⁷⁵

Cosmology points to the Big Bang, but what occurred before the starting point is a question that is beyond the realm of science. Time + matter + chance is called into question by the “anthropic principle” which puts forth that the events involved immediately after the initial beginning of the universe are so precisely placed and timed as to defy an odds of being a happenstance occurrence. Quantum physics takes science completely out of the realm of seeking to find the common entity that comprises all matter. Scientists have found that as they enter more and more deeply into “Inner space”, science just gets weird. Modern science postulated that all matter was made up of atoms, which were modeled after solar systems, with a nucleus as its ‘sun’ and electrons as its ‘planets, stars, and moons’. Quantum physics does not speak in terms of cause and effect as two bodies interact with one another, but in terms of “quanta” or chunks of energy, the wave-particle duality of matter (which states that matter will appear as a wave or as particles depending on how it is observed), and the uncertainty principle.

Quantum physics defies the ability to imagine what it describes, seemingly violating the basic canons of logic or common sense. When experiments prove that

⁷⁵Ibid - Colson - *How Now Shall We Live* - p. 68.

light is either a particle or a wave, depending on how it is observed, it seems as if the fundamental law of non-contradiction is violated, as if reality is not rational.⁷⁶

The complex world of the new physics is vastly different from the simple, static, objective universe of Galileo and Newton. It is not as much a creation as a creating. And the universe is not an existing entity that *has* a history; rather it *is* history.⁷⁷

All points are relative to all others, and there is only one absolute, namely, the speed of light. Furthermore, the work done on the fundamental structure of matter has led to a world where entities that can hardly be called “things” in any ordinary sense operate according to principles that cannot be described in mechanical terms. There is no way in which the most fundamental elements in the structure of the atom, as modern physics understands it, can be visualized. Leptons and quarks, muons and photons are not pieces of matter in any imaginable sense. Nor is it possible to form any visual image of anti-matter. **Matter is an affair of changing relationships between non-material entities.**⁷⁸ (this author’s emphasis).

Newer theories overthrow the idea of a “substantial” universe altogether. The universe is not composed of individual particles possessing specific essences within themselves, say the new physicists, elementary particles are actually far more dependent on their context - their relationships to one another - than the mechanistic model anticipates. In fact, at its most fundamental level, physical reality does not seem to be composed of independently existing particles at all but of dynamic

⁷⁶*Postmodern Times* - Veith - p. 43.

⁷⁷*A Primer on Postmodernism* - Stanley J. Grenz - William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. - Grand Rapids, MI - 1996 - p. 53.

⁷⁸*Foolishness to the Greeks* - Lesslie Newbigin - William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. - Grand Rapids, MI - 1986 - p 68-69.

relations.⁷⁹

It is now possible to see the tenets of postmodernism more clearly in the light of the paradigm shift within the realm of science.

MODERNITY	POSTMODERNITY
- linear process	- fragmentation
- absolute truths	- Indeterminacy
- the rational planning of social orders	- intense distrust of all universal or totalizing
- standardization of knowledge and production	- discourses... ⁸¹

Postmodernism likewise entails a rejection of the emphasis on rational discovery through scientific method, which provided the intellectual foundation for the modern attempt to construct a better world. At its foundation, then, the postmodern outlook is anti-modern.⁸²

In postmodernism there is a shift away from the distinction between the subject and the object. Life is viewed, instead, as the dialectical interaction of all things. Because all things are in symbiotic relationship with each other, the notion of absolutes has been given up by many postmoderns. It is not possible, they say, to see things apart from their dependent enmeshment with all things. Everything is relative to everything else.

Postmodernism philosophy draws on the conclusion of science to assert there is no single unifying factor to the universe. The world is characterized by a “web of relationships” none of which is the key to unlock the universe. The view has resulted

⁷⁹A *Primer on Postmodernism* - Stanley J. Grenz - p. 52.

⁸¹ Veith – *Postmodern Times* – p. 42

⁸² Grenz – *A Primer on Postmodernism* – p. 12.

in pluralism, the notion that there are many ways, not one.⁸³

The world of modernity is a world of “facts”, facts which can be known “know” and which in turn everyone needs to learn. It is a closed world of cause and effect, a world from which purpose has been excluded as a category of explanation, and in which – therefore – there can be no judgment of “good” or “bad.” It is a world of value-free facts.

Scientific developments during the present century have called this picture radically into question. First, the advance of particle physics has shown that the ultimate elements that are called “matter” are not material. It is no longer possible to envisage the atom as a system of rotating particles like billiard balls. As far as modern physics has penetrated into the secrets of the atom, its ultimate constitution may be described as a pattern of relationships between non-material entities – relationships which can be represented mathematically but cannot be visualized. Second, the development especially of quantum physics has shown that a picture of the cosmos which excludes the observing subject (as classical physics did) is not a true picture. The scientist, with his purposes, is part of the picture.⁸⁴

Chuck Smith asks, “What Puts the Post in Postmodernity?”

PM is what comes after we stop thinking like engineers – rationalism.

PM is what comes after the cult of science – scientism.

PM is what comes after we have given up the belief that there is a goal or meaning to history – historicism.

PM is what comes after we give up the notion of truth – that it actually

⁸³ Webber – *Ancient-Future Faith* – p. 23.

⁸⁴ Newbegin – *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* – p. 37.

exists outside of individual minds, that it is universal and eternal – absolutism.

PM is what comes after the universe no longer really exists – realism.

PM is what comes after people stop believing their culture is the one true culture or the best of cultures – ethnocentrism.⁸⁵

Postmodernism rejects the terms and tenets of modernity, and it calls us, particularly through the realm of science, to see reality (not “truth”) in a new and different way.

THREE MODELS OF TRUTH - A POINT OF CONVERGENCE

Three models of truth have been outlined thus far - one in which truth is viewed as solid, immovable, and lasting - the second where all truth is relative - and a third alternative where truth is defined in terms of rooted-ness and being alive. The first model is shared by an initial biblical understanding of truth and modernity’s understanding of truth. The second, which is distinctly postmodern, views truth apart from any sense of foundation. It sees truth as being relative in that all truth statements are dependent upon one another. They have no foundation apart from themselves or as they stand in inter-dependent relation to one another. The third model is drawn from a fuller, biblical understanding of foundations that sees truth as being dynamic and living. It is radical in that it is not seen in terms of foundation stones but in terms of rooted-ness. More than the idea of a building built upon a solid base, biblical truth can be looked at more like a tree whose roots provide a “foundation” for the tree. The challenge, theologically and philosophically, is to call

⁸⁵ Chuck Smith – *The End of the World...As We Know It* – Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001 – p. 2.

upon postmodern people to be consistent with their own assumptions and the conclusions that stem from them. Postmodernity contends that modernity's view of truth is stilted, narrow, and archaic. Postmoderns are in danger of being similarly criticized. They too must be open to new expressions of truth and also realize that not all truth claims and plausibility structures are created equal.

In the transition from the premodern era to the modern era, the Christian response failed in a number of ways -

The Church was overconfident of its position of authority in the culture.

The Church's response was regarded as premodern and irrelevant.

The Church underestimated the long-range impact of the philosophical changes taking place.⁸⁶

The Christian response to modernity has its share of weaknesses as well. Descartes' intent was to devise a method of investigation that could facilitate the discovery of those truths that were absolutely certain.⁸⁷ Newton contributed the idea of a mechanistic universe and Bacon the scientific method. The result of these was to produce that which is (was?) objective truth - along the lines of the first model and foundation stones. In the realm of the religious, Conservative Christians took on the tenets of modernity in the way they engaged in spiritual warfare and evangelism. In response to the threat of liberal theologies of varying kinds, conservatives, from the most fundamental to evangelical to mainline, adopted a propositional approach whereby certain "truths" regarding Christian faith were deemed absolute and objective. They were laid out and defended against any and all threats on the one

⁸⁶ Ibid - Church Smith - *The End of the World...As We Know It*.

⁸⁷ Grenz - *A Primer on Postmodernism* - p. 64.

hand, and became the content of their evangelistic efforts and approach.

Evangelism became a kind of science in itself. Content was combined with particular techniques and taught as evangelism. Evangelism was considered “accomplished” when the techniques were employed to discharge the content of the gospel. Success was declared when the target sinner prayed the prayer of invitation - acknowledging her worthlessness and sin and inviting Christ to dwell in her life. Evangelism became more a matter of recruiting than of witnessing to the faith and pointing people toward Christ - meeting people where they are and helping them take the next step.

Conservatives allowed modernity to dictate the battleground. Is it any wonder that the Church did not fare well?

Christianity must be aware of the developing dynamics of postmodernism in order to respond appropriately and effectively. C. S. Lewis wrote that reality is always more complicated than we want it to be.⁸⁸ Science affirms this statement when viewed relative to modernity. Postmodern science embraces complexity. The Church/church cannot afford to respond to postmodernism in a way that is overly simplistic. The modern and human tendency is to do so. The question at work concerns whether or not this kind of complexity can be brought into a consistent understanding of Christianity and how the Church/church can endeavor to do the work of evangelism and discipleship in light of that complexity. There is a direct correlation to the way that foundations are understood. Biblically, the concept and meaning of foundations is not static. It is dynamic. Foundations cannot and must not be understood or viewed separately. They are a part of a larger whole and must

⁸⁸ see *Mere Christianity* – C. S. Lewis – Simon & Schuster – Touchstone edition – 1996 – p. 147.

be seen as an integral part of the whole. Beyond this, foundations serve a purpose. They are not an end in themselves. That end is the same when considering the universe, a building, or a tree. The purpose is the giving and facilitating of Life. Initially, this is a matter of common grace that creates a point of interface and dialogue with the postmodern world - a kind of pre-evangelistic conversation that must take place before a person can act as a sign post to the special grace of Christ who is the true foundation. David Wells comments:

A Christian view of life is centered (in contrast to postmodernism) in Christ. He is the hub that holds it all together. He is the one from whom all of the parts derive their meaning.⁸⁹

Dr. Wells goes on to quote Peter Berger:

God as the center, has been lost. Providence has been replaced by chance and luck.⁹⁰

Postmodernism is described as being everything that modernism is not. It seems to be either a negative reaction against modernism or it's simply the next step in attempting to live life as if God doesn't exist and humankind is a god(s) in its own right. Given the rapid development of genetic engineering, postmodernism may give way to post-humanism.

Postmodernism doesn't have to react negatively to everything that modernity represents and stands for. It can and should be a reaction to the excesses of modernity. Chuck Smith points out that it can be viewed as the attraction of opposites:

⁸⁹ Dr. David Wells - *Dmin class notes* - 1-20-04

⁹⁰ Ibid

PM – The attraction of opposites

<u>Modern</u>	<u>Postmodern</u>
individuality	community
unity	pluralism
protocol	spontaneity
irrelevance	relevance
rational	experiential
tradition	innovation
meta-narrative	competing narratives ⁹¹

Science has raised questions that modernity is not prepared to answer.

Postmodernism has put aside a mechanistic, closed-system worldview, but how has it been replaced? Postmodernism struggles with inconsistencies of its own.

To say that there are no absolutes is an absolute statement in itself.

To say there are no metaphysics is itself a metaphysical statement.

To contend that there is no truth is a truth statement in itself. Could this be false?

Science offers us a unique perspective on the pre-mode-post continuum. For instance, when science asks the question whether light is made up of particles or waves, the answer is “Yes” depending on how it (light) is looked upon. In one way, it has the characteristics of particles. In another, it has the characteristics of waves. The answer to the question is not one or the other, but both. Postmodernism, as a reaction to modernity, is reluctant to admit that it still argues on the basis of modernity - either/or - while at the same time reacting against such an approach. Is

⁹¹ Chuck Smith-*The End of the World As We Know it* - Colorado Springs, WaterBrook Press, 2001 - p. 2

there another way, a third way to understand truth? There is. It is not static or relative, but a living way.

Much like the scientific understanding of light, the Scriptures are full of dynamic tensions, instances where the answer is not either/or, but both/and. Some of those tensions are as follows:

Is God immanent or transcendent?

Is God all-loving or all-powerful?

Is God's will a matter of predestination or freewill?

Does God convey truth by way of reason or revelation?

Are the Scriptures prescriptive or descriptive?

Is Jesus Christ divine or human?

Are human beings mind or body or spirit?

Is every human being truly unique or are they same as everyone else?

Are human beings observers in the universe or participants in the process?

Does language define or describe?

Postmodernism is loathe to acknowledge such dynamic tensions for reasons, much like those who erected the tower of Babel, because it would require them to recognize that they are not gods in their own right, that truth is not self defined, and that God is God and "we" are not.

Rather than see the pre-mod-post continuum as a linear movement in which there is no going back, it can be viewed as a progression in which the dynamic tensions develop in a cumulative fashion, where there are in actuality elements and aspects of all three that come to bear in the present day. Chuck Smith identifies the seeds of postmodern faith:

Seeds of PM Faith

Faith comes through simplicity – the premodern element

Faith comes through skepticism – the modern element

Faith comes through symbols – the PM element ⁹²

Reconstructing the Faith – What materials are needed to construct a PM faith?

We need the message of premodern faith (the apostolic)

We need the reasons of the modern faith (the apologetic)

We need the signs and symbols of PM faith (the authentic)

The Sacred Text

The spiritual community

The sacraments and rituals

The spiritual experience of individual believers⁹³

This author would agree with Robert Webber that in the postmodern era and on to whatever will come after it, there is an opportunity more than a problem.

The first and perhaps most fundamental challenge to modernity with its emphasis on reason and empirical methods comes from the 20th century revolution in science. The mechanistic worldview of the Enlightenment and the high estimate of human reason to understand the way the world works began to break down with the smashing of the atom.⁹⁴

The first impact of the new science was to open the door to mystery once again. The world now appears to be complex and mysterious. A new scientific posture of

⁹² Ibid

⁹³ Ibid

⁹⁴ *Ancient-Future Faith* - Robert Webber - p. 21.

humility before the vastness and complexity of the universe has taken shape.

A second result of the new science with its theory of relativity and quantum mechanics is a shift from dualism to holism. The new revolution in physics argues for a dynamic and interrelated world. Quantum theory has demonstrated that the substance-quantity nature of the particle, a basic feature of Newtonian physics, has been replaced by a concept that is essentially dynamic, involving space and time.

A third result is a shift from a world that stands still to a world that is in perpetual motion which has resulted in a new approach to fact: Because matter is in perpetual movement, postmoderns argue that it is impossible to arrive at rational and scientific facts. Therefore, it is now recognized, even in science, that one needs to bring to “fact” a framework of thought that is based on faith. The assumption that there is no God is a faith-commitment as much as the assumption that there is a God.⁹⁵

This shift into mystery, holism, and interpreted fact, instead of necessitating a new theology, makes the historic and traditional theology of the church relevant once again. The theology of the ancient church was characterized by mystery, a holism that rejected all dualistic structures of thought and the interpretation of the Christ-fact. The understanding of God and God’s relationship to the world in creation, incarnation, and re-creation, was hammered out in the framework of a commitment to a God who participates in history and works out the salvation of the entire cosmos from within the created order. This holistic understanding of God and creation as the central mystery of the Christian faith holds the greatest potential for an intelligent recovery of classical Christianity in a postmodern world.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibid - p. 21-22

⁹⁶ Ibid - p. 22.

CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE POSTMODERN WORLD

In its rejection of modernity, postmodernity opens a number of avenues through which the truth of Christ can be conveyed. How can this be done? Robert Webber again addresses the subject.

We evangelicals need to listen to the philosophical interpretation of the cultural shift now taking place. These philosophers are setting the trajectories of the future by describing the dialectic, interactive view of life that prevails in our Western culture. It is in this culture that we are to communicate, embody, and live out the Christian faith. Let's look at some of the major issues raised by the current philosophical analysis -

1. In postmodernism there is a shift away from the distinction between subject and object. Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* challenged the subject/object distinction by arguing that the self cannot be fully understood apart from a relationship to others and to his or her cultural surroundings. This view has resulted in the shift from individualism to community. We are "beings in the world enmeshed in social networks," not individual autonomous selves. This postmodern concept called is called "symbiosis" and emphasizes the interrelationship of things.

2. Because all things are in symbiotic relationship with each other, the notion of absolutes has been given up by postmoderns. Everything is relative to everything else.

3. Postmodern philosophy draws on the conclusions of science to assert there is no single unifying factor to the universe.

4. Postmoderns have attacked the authority of language. Truth does not reside

in words but in contextual and historical situations in which words are used.⁹⁷

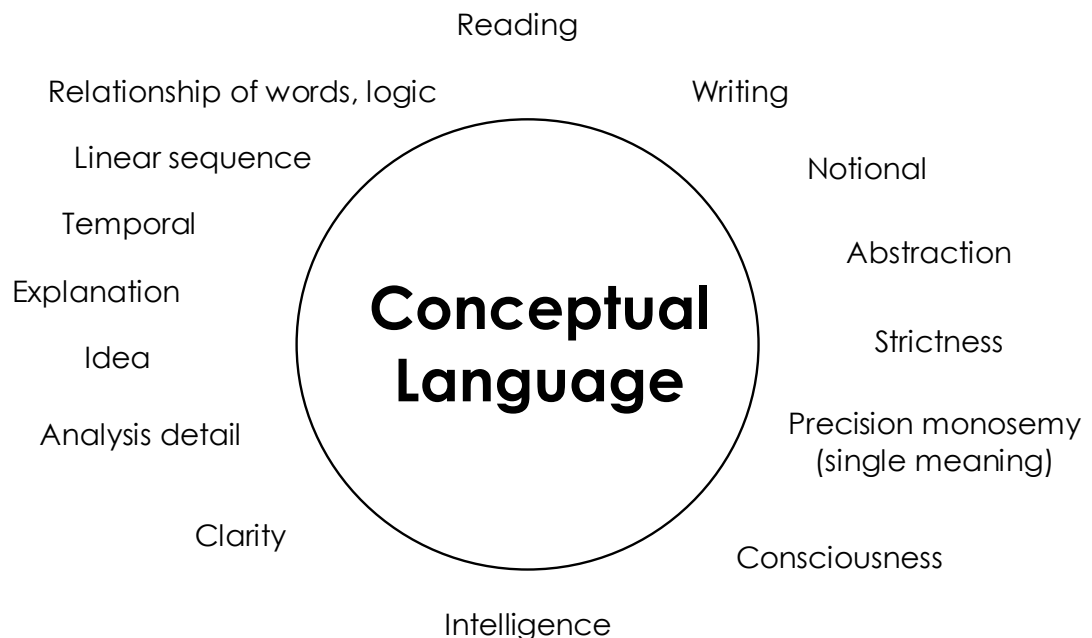
The movement into the postmodern world and beyond is a paradigm shift of major proportion. Even viewing it through the lens of science tells us that thinking and communicating must be done differently. Just how different is conveyed by Robert Webber: (See Figure-1 - language charts on the page 63).

A CCMPARISON OF ENLIGHTENMENT AND POST-ENLIGHTENMENT COMMUNICATION

The form of communication that dominated the Enlightenment and affected the worship of the church was that of conceptual language. The new form of communication of the post-Enlightenment world is that of symbolic language.⁹⁸

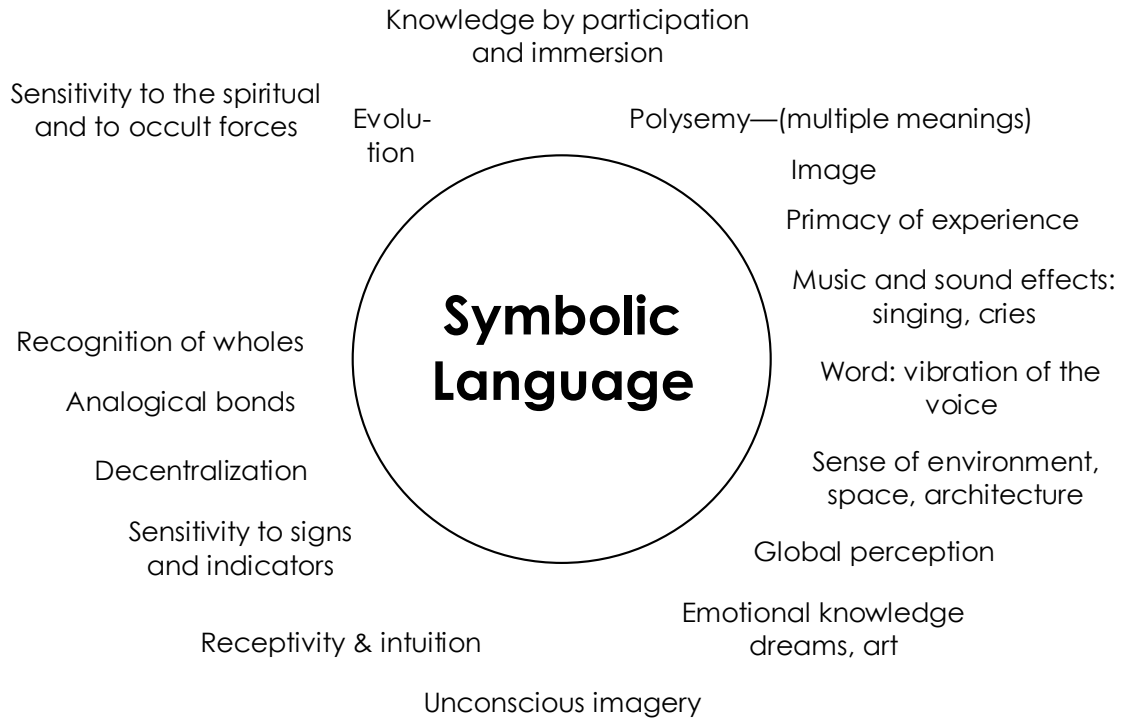
See Figure 1 which follows:

Figure 1



⁹⁷ Ibid p. 22-23.

⁹⁸ cited in *Ancient-Future Faith* - Robert Webber - p. 105 – from Pierre Babin, *the New Era in Religious Communication* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 150-151. Used for this thesis with written permission of AUGSBURG FORTRESS PRESS Publishers – October 2006 – nathan.leaf@augsbουργfortress.org



With the dawn of postmodernity, the mission field is “here” more than it is “over there”. It is among “us” as opposed to apart from “us”. To be missional is to realize that Christians are missionaries as well as mission fields simultaneously. As a function of the “now but not yet” of faith, Christians are called to be witnesses to their faith and also to be constantly growing and disciplined in their faith. This missionary/mission field dynamic is the voice with which the church speaks to the culture and the voice with which the members of the community of faith speak to one another. Rather than speaking as those who have arrived, the church must convey a sense of “being in the Way and on the Way.” The challenge before the church today is to create a theology of mission that learns the language of the changing culture. The above illustrations are helpful in directing attention toward multiple meanings - what have called dynamic tensions - and evolution by threshold rather than by linear

accomplishment. In viewing the three models of truth, outlined earlier, it is not that one model supercedes another as a kind of progression of truth unfolds. In a sense, all of them work together - not in a linear fashion, but collectively and holistically. The picture of a three-dimensional chess board comes to mind - where the game is played on each of three levels simultaneously, with the pieces moving not only on each plane, but also moving up and down from plane to plane. The same could be said with regard to the pre-mod-post modern continuum. If viewed in a linear fashion, one era supplants the next. If viewed in light of each one being a threshold - or a different level of the three-dimensional chessboard - then they are seen as dynamic and interactive. This is a more complex understanding of the reality that is at work, but this kind of thinking is what is called for.

It is important that Christian faith not be viewed as one faith among many in the smorgasbord of religious thought. Christ must be affirmed as Savior and Lord and the center of all that is. But what is it that makes Christianity unique? What makes it stand apart from all other world religions and thought systems?

During a British conference on comparative religions, experts from around the world debated what, if any, belief was unique to the Christian faith. They began eliminating possibilities. Incarnation? Other religions had different versions of gods appearing in human form. Resurrection? Again, other religions had accounts of return from death. The debate went on for some time until C. S. Lewis wandered into the room. "What's the rumpus about?" he asked, and heard in reply that his colleagues were discussing Christianity's unique contribution among world religions.

Lewis responded, “Oh, that’s easy. It’s grace.”⁹⁹

Yancey goes on to describe grace - It is to know that there is nothing we can do to make God love us more and that there is nothing we can do to make God love us less.¹⁰⁰ Grace - the word stands as an acrostic of what it means - God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. It behooves us to communicate this grace in a gracious and grace-full way. But grace cannot stand alone. It must be held in dynamic tension with truth.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, ***full of grace and truth***. John 1:1,14 - emphasis added.

The world wants truth. It does not want it on the terms that modernity dictated, be it in the realm of the sacred or the secular. Christians must adhere to the existence of Truth. Postmodernity’s attempt to over analyze truth right out of existence will not suffice. At the same time, modernity’s simplistic view of truth will not do either. In this, the way out is in. The task ahead involves entering more deeply into the heart and movement of postmodern people, working to understand of them as persons and truth in the manner in which they see it so that communication can take place that is both meaningful and effective.

DNA’s double helix is a perfect balance at life’s core. Two strands of DNA wrap around each other, an axis of symmetry. The two strands run opposite directions, providing perfect correction for each other. Grace and truth are spiritual DNA, the

⁹⁹ *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* - Philip Yancey - Zondervan - 1997 - p. 45 - citing Scott Hoezee - *The Riddle of Grace* - Eerdmans - Grand Rapids - 1996 - p. 42.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

building blocks of Christ-centered living. The complementary strands create flawless spiritual balance and stability. Though the strands run in opposite directions, they correspond perfectly. Without both strands we cannot properly function.¹⁰¹

The more conservative church has been guilty of emphasizing truth at the expense of grace. Evangelism in this context is more a matter of recruiting or trying to coerce or pummel people into the kingdom with the club of truth, the Bible. The more liberal church has been guilty of emphasizing grace at the expense of truth - accepting people as persons, but never holding them to account.

Another opportunity exists to reach the postmodern person through the dynamic of the church as a faith community. In the postmodern era, community is eclipsing the autonomous individual. This opportunity brings with it a corresponding challenge, namely the need to create a context in which to convey the content of Christian faith. However this can only be done in conjunction with an ever deepening commitment on the part of the church, the people of God, the family of faith, to be more committed to bridging the gaps that exist between beliefs, words, and actions. The world is watching and if the walk does not square with the witness, then the world will continue to go elsewhere. Who can blame them?

Another avenue open to reaching postmodern people is by way of reestablishing the relationship between art and theology. The premodern era placed its stress on art, while modernity stressed theology. Rather than an either-or kind of relationship between the two, the present day calls for a dynamic convergence of the two. The intellect and the heart must be addressed.. The will and the emotions must be

¹⁰¹ *The Grace and Truth Paradox* - Randy Alcorn - Multnomah Publishers - Sister, Oregon - 2003 - p. 23.

affected – the challenge is to minister to persons in their wholeness and entirety, not breaking them down into their component parts, speaking to each part and subsequently reassembling them into the larger whole. For many Christians, theology takes priority. But theology needs to be balanced with the ability to appeal to the artistic and intuitive side of a person's being. This balance is highlighted in an interview done by Philip Yancey with Annie Dillard -

Here I depart from the British rationalists like C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and George MacDonald. I am grounded strongly in art and weakly in theology. There is a profound difference between the two fields. If I wanted to make a theological statement I would have hired a skywriter. Instead, I knock myself out to do art, and it's not so airtight. It isn't reducible to a sealed system. It doesn't translate so well.¹⁰²

The kind of shift and balance that Dillard speaks of is crucial in looking toward the life of the church in the future. In her own way, she indicates the need for the dynamic tension that has been encouraged earlier in this paper.

THEOLOGY AND STRATEGY FOR MINISTRY TO POSTMODERN PEOPLE.

Radical faith is essentially an attempt at putting new wine into new wineskins. It requires, first of all, an understanding, that regardless of people's understanding of truth, as those who are created in the image of God, that persons are a part of something larger than self. The existentialism that has served as the groundwork of postmodernism is inadequate. It is rooted in the self, which, from a biblical vantage

¹⁰² *Open Windows* - Philip Yancey - Crossway Books - Westchester, IL, a division of Good News Publishers - 1982 - p. 138.

point, will never be enough. God is God and Creator. “We” as created beings, are not. The problem of Babel is an ongoing problem. All of the efforts of humanity have failed to produce “progress”, contrary to the optimism of modernity and to the way that postmodernism sees language and its ability to create or define reality. Ken Myers says it well when he states: Biblical Christianity teaches that the self is not self-defining. We are all created in the image of God, whether or not we want to be. . We all stand in judgment before a holy God, whether or not we want to. We have all been given natural abilities, opportunities, frustrations, and liabilities by a sovereign God. We do not, as many would have us believe, “create our own reality.” There is one reality, ordered by the one God. We are answerable to Him for our conduct within that reality. Our cultural life should encourage us to acknowledge that reality and its center in Jesus Christ, not in our self.¹⁰³

This orientation with reference to God is radical in a way that is life-giving. It translates in terms of how ministry is done in the present day within the context of the paradigm shift from modernity to postmodernity. A basic emphasis in worship needs to understand that “It’s not about us” - “It’s about God.” This is so obvious that it seems as if it need not be stated, but when applied to worship in particular and Christian orthodoxy and Christian orthopraxy, it marks an essential orientation. The prevailing, present day culture is obsessed with self. Andy Crouch has said that postmodernism is the environment that has been established for advanced consumer capitalism.¹⁰⁴ The prevailing culture lives as though the bumper sticker is true: “In the end, the one with the most toys wins.” Another salvo in the “slogan

¹⁰³ *All God’s Children and Blue Suede Shoes* - Ken Myers - Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL - a division of Good News Publishers - 1989 - p. 101.

¹⁰⁴ Andy Crouch - *Class Notes* - January 19, 2004

wars” goes a step further. It reads, “In the end, the one with the most toys still dies.” And then it references Mark 8:36 - “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” The life of the believer must be rooted and focused in the Triune God .

The church in the postmodern era and beyond is called -

- to focus on God and not on self - this is a decidedly counter-cultural approach.
- to create worship that is not only theological and didactic, but experiential, symbolic, artistically pleasing, engaging, participatory, Spirit-centered, and congregation sensitive.
- to see people as whole persons, loved by God - being willing to meet them where they are and help them take the next step in their walk of faith.
- to draw upon the liturgy, creedal statements and the “rule of faith” handed on to us by the pre-Constantine church.
- to restore an apocalyptic element to faith that is more than the theology espoused by *The Late, Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey and the *Left Behind Series* by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jones.

The time (*kairos*) is coming when God will fulfill all he has promised. This knowledge creates an air of reverence and worship, anticipation and fear, and expectation and urgency.

CONCLUSION

Postmodernism is a reaction to an overly narrow understanding of reality on the part of modernity. Science has taken the lead, historically, in the development of this thinking. Science has fueled the drive from modernity to postmodernity by

demonstrating time and time again, that a mechanistic understanding of the universe and its workings is inadequate. Modernity's categories have been shown to be too limiting. As science has extended beyond the defined and accepted limits of modern science, it has created a dilemma for the modern worldview. The lines of demarcation between the modern era and the postmodern era are not sharply defined.

A difficulty occurs when peoples' thinking remains rooted in modernity as movement is made into and through the postmodern era. Some are simply more comfortable with a modern worldview in which there is a certain amount of knowledge that is deemed knowable and understandable. A scientific, intellectual worldview, dependent on cause and effect relationships, means that the world (and subsequently life) works in a way that can be discovered and understood. The new science jettisons such idealism. The realization that scientifically the distinction between matter and energy does not really exist is a mind-boggling paradigm shift in itself. Beyond this, it is clear that the full scope of scientific knowledge is beyond the vast majority of people. And there is still more to discover. There will be more surprises along the way.

Science calls us to realize that there is more to it all than what has ever been understood or imagined. The nice neat little package of "modern science" isn't so nice or neat after all. This can leave people scratching their heads and it can even drive them to despair. An expansive understanding of science means that the world is beyond the manner in which it has been previously conceived. This creates a problem for the scientist and for those who construct their worldview based on a scientific understanding of reality and truth. To use the biblical illustration, the tower

of Babel that modernity sought to erect has crumbled. The question now is whether or not science will try to reconstruct the tower out of the scattered remains or turn in another direction. For those who see science as the avenue through which things are defined, the quest will continue. For those who do not see science as an end in itself, the end of modernity broadens their perspective.

Postmodernism faces the danger that it will only be a reaction to modernity, in the area of science as well as in other disciplines. It must be more. It must do more. Postmodernism must look beyond itself to a new way of thinking, one that is not static or mechanistic, but also one that is not simply relative and resting on thin air. Postmodernism opens a number of doors of possibility because it has rejected modern science. Not only does such a shift provide a different view of the world, it also affords us a new vision of God. It is a new kind of Copernican revolution. The world has once again discovered that it is not the center of the solar system or of the universe. It includes humanity, but it is not limited to humanity.

In this, postmodernism has a responsibility to be true to its own convictions. It cannot afford to react to modernity and at the same time play by modernity's rules. At this point, a biblical understanding of foundations and radical faith has something to say in offering a new way of seeing and understanding - a way that sees the place and power of transcendence and mystery in a new way. It is a way that is rooted in life, both physical and spiritual and in a kind of purposefulness that has its origins in the living God and includes humankind in a purposeful, cooperative existence in relation to God. This relatedness is established in the rootedness of God, in abiding in the vine that is Christ, so that the fruit that God intends and desires might be produced.

As the premodern to modern to postmodern continuum unfolds, Christians who make up the local church have a unique opportunity to be witnesses to Christ and witnesses to the culture. The impetus begins with a desire is to do all things to the glory of God - to live and love like Jesus does - to meet people where they are and help them take the next step, whatever that might be - to see through the Scriptures to grapple with and to grasp the truth of God - and to seek to engage and involve others in that same process, with all the passion and intensity that God can instill and inspire.

It is also necessary to identify points of paradox or dynamic tension and to enter into them. One such tension is as to whether or not salvation in Christ is individual or corporate (?). The answer is yes. But many in the church today would rather rely on the certainties of an either/or orientation rather than deal with the tension and ambiguity of a both/and balance. For some in the mainline or traditional church, being a part of the church is simply something that they do for personal and social reasons. Salvation and sanctification is not a part of their thinking. In contrast, others claim to have made a commitment to Christ but choose not to be a part of the Church/church. More and more people identify themselves (excuse themselves) by claiming that they are spiritual but not religious.

The final point in this paper is to recognize the difference between commitment and conviction. Commitments are what people say, think, and believe. Convictions are the way that people live and act when their commitments are put to the test. Those who comprise the Church/church must live out their convictions and thereby create a platform from which the Gospel can not only be preached, but demonstrated. The content of faith is empty apart from a context for that same faith.

Only after this has been done can the Church/church challenge postmoderns at the level of their commitments - philosophically and theologically. And beyond this, the challenge must also go out to postmodern people to be consistent with their own convictions. However, the Church must do this, not standing across from others, in an accusatory posture, but standing along side others in a willingness to go with them in their walk of faith. This is the place where Christianity has a unique opportunity to raise its voice knowing that as Christ is lifted up he will draw others to himself. (cf. John 12:32).

CHAPTER THREE

Survey Development and Analysis

ESSENTIAL BELIEF

Radical Faith/Essential Belief is essential in order to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly and consistently. The idea of essential beliefs runs contrary to the post-modern mindset, which sees everything in terms of plurality and relativism. Many people, who have given up on civil religion, have drawn their understanding of faith from the spiritual smorgasbord offered by the world. The buffet of modern-day faith is drawn from popular religion, television and movies, politics, as well as being entrenched in an unquestioned scientific, corporate, capitalistic world-view.

Another reason why Radical Faith/Essential Belief is essential is that it serves as a unifying factor in the Church Universal and as a counter-cultural influence in the present day and age. Sadly, the inconsistency within the church particular is only exceeded by the tension and division in the Church universal. Churches seem to function best when they stand in opposition to someone or something. The Scriptures tell us that Christ will build his Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). Fortunately, the existence of the Church/church depends on the faithfulness of God and not on human capability. Beyond mere survival, the Lord also desires the Church to be presented without stain, wrinkle, or blemish. It is to be radiant, holy, and blameless (Ephesians 5:27). Jesus prays for

unity among the believers so that the world might know that he (Christ) came from the Father (John 17:21).

There is no question that it will take an act of God to accomplish what Paul describes in Ephesians 5. The Church is dis-unified both within and without. In the mainline churches, there is factionalism, competitiveness, accommodation, and duplicity. There is also a willingness to do what is popular at the expense of what is right and true. On the other side of the ledger, the evangelical church has a bent toward being isolationist, shallow, and immediate. As a result, a unified witness to the world is lacking. While, on the one hand, many do not take the Church seriously, others are more and more inclined to be “spiritual” apart from being religious.

The Church has become less a part of the equation even for many who have had a “born-again” experience. A growing number are tired of shopping and simply going nowhere. Those outside of the Church want no part of it because all they can see is infighting and division. In a culture that is plagued by dysfunction and holds sacred the importance of making choices or “keeping one’s options open”, why would the Church be a worthwhile choice? It is an option only when it has something truly meaningful to offer, namely Christ.

Radical Faith is “essential” in reference to those aspects of faith that cannot be eliminated without compromising the substance of Christian faith. The notion that Christianity represents just one option among many is not new to the postmodern era. Thus, communicating the crucial nature of Christian faith is especially important in light of the *mélange* of all other truth claims: Christianity cannot be essential and optional at the same time. In addition to the theological and philosophical attack upon essential Christian belief, the present day issues any number of moral, political,

social, and technological challenges from the standpoint of “what’s in it for me.” This mentality, which originated prior to the postmodern era, finds its own particular expression here.

There is an enormous need to evangelize the church, in spirit and in truth. The cultivation of Radical Faith must not be dictatorial or dogmatic. It must be both God-centered and person-oriented. Rather than tell people what to believe, they need to sense that they are invited and involved in a quest, an odyssey of faith and discovery. If “I” can be in it with them and they with “me”, and if the Lord Himself is over, under, and integral to the entire process, then the quest for essential faith can be an effective way of being used of God that others might embrace Christ as Savior and Lord and live for him.

What is essential about Radical Faith? In the history of the Church, there was a time when there was a tremendous movement to stress the fundamentals of the faith. The fundamentals must be distinguished from Fundamentalism, the theology that developed as an off-shoot of this movement. The original understanding of the fundamentals was not as narrow or as rigid as the dispensational, pre-millennial religion that has taken the term captive. The fundamentals consisted of the essentials of the faith, those biblical truths and doctrines that CANNOT be compromised and would serve to unite Christians regardless of their religious or worship tradition. They stand as a “plumb-line” in relation to a world that is unbelieving, uninformed, or actively hostile to the Gospel.

In broad terms, the essentials of the Christian faith are these:

1. God is the Creator and Sustainer of all that is.

2. The Bible is the revelation of God, revealing His faithfulness and His redemptive purpose in establishing a people for Himself.

3. Jesus Christ is the means through which God has made good on His promise.

More specifically, Essential belief affirms:

- the virgin conception
- that Jesus is God in the flesh
- the atoning work of Christ on the Cross
- the physical resurrection and its power over sin and death
- the ascension of Christ
- the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Christ's presence throughout the world today.
- the return of Christ in power and glory to establish his kingdom for all eternity.

Classic statements of faith, such as the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed have a pivotal place in the worship life of the Church and should be central (along with preaching, prayer, singing, etc.) in the teaching of essential belief.

THE APOSTLE'S CREED

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From this place he will come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic

Church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

THE NICENE CREED

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end. And we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Such statements of faith provide a biblical and theological framework for and touchstone with other Christians. These statements stand as a baseline of essential faith, out of which arises the way Christians formulate, articulate, and live out their faith in the world. To say that essential belief is important is an understatement: Too many churches and too many Christians simply give liturgical lip-service to the creeds that have informed and shaped historic Christian faith.

THE SURVEY

In an effort to discern how people understand essential belief, I developed a survey designed to measure understanding in four general areas:

PART I

PART I-A – Religious/Personal (questions 1-3)

PART 1-B – Religious Practice (questions 4-6)

PART 1-C - Yes-No Questions (questions 7-18)

Demographics (Optional)

PART II

Essential Belief – Agree-Disagree Responses (questions a-j)

Responses in PART I-A, I-B, and PART II have been given assigned values based on their closeness to orthodoxy. Totals for each section were then calculated and added together to create a “total belief quotient”. This total is then used to evaluate each response and each section as compared to the responses overall, thus providing indicators of “essentiality”: what is and what is not essential.

The Demographic section serves to gain a sense of essential belief in relation to the age of each respondents their church affiliation, and the number of years each has been involved in the Church.

THE SCOPE OF THE SURVEY DISTRIBUTION

The survey was directed to “Any and all who would like to respond.” It was sent via email to family, friends, and acquaintances. Hard copies were made available to the members of the local church family and mailed to those who requested them. Some of those people who received the survey via email forwarded it to others. The result was a broader cross-section of response than would have been achieved had the distribution been limited to people in the local church. In all, 91 responses were received, 14 from clergy and 77 from laity. Responses from both clergy and laity were calculated and compared. In some instances, responses from the entire group are considered. In other instances, the two are compared to one another.

The survey that was distributed is as follows:

ESSENTIAL BELIEFS SURVEY – PART I
RevWPF@aol.com - June 2003
Rev. W. P. Fillebrown – 7 River St. – Plymouth, MA 02360

1 I consider myself to be a Christian -

☐ yes ☐ no ☐ other

2 I have been baptized -

☐ as an infant ☐ as a believer ☐ no

3 I see myself as having been a Christian -

☐ from birth ☐ since baptism ☐ since a particular date

4 I have received specific instruction as to what it means to know and live the Christian life - in the way of a catechism class, a confirmation class, or a new believers class -

☐ yes ☐ no ☐ other

5 It is vital to my spiritual well-being to worship with my local, gathered congregation

☐ more than once/week ☐ once/month ☐ less than once/month

6 My stewardship commitment to the church that I attend is to -

☐ tithe ☐ pledge ☐ give regularly ☐ give occasionally

☐ give in response to expressed need

YES-NO QUESTIONS

7 I believe that when people are born, they are neither good nor evil; they make a choice between the two as they mature -

☐ yes ☐ no

8 There are truths that are valid for all people, at all times, in all circumstances -

☐ yes ☐ no ☐ other

9 It is possible to communicate with others after they die -

☐ yes ☐ no

10 I believe that the Bible can only be correctly interpreted by people who have had years of intense training in theology -

☐ yes ☐ no

11 The Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths -

☐ yes ☐ no

12 God is one Person in three separate and equal Persons – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit -

☐ yes ☐ no

13 The devil, or Satan, is not a living entity, but a symbol of evil –

☐ yes ☐ no

14 Every person has a soul that will live forever, either in God's presence or absence.

☐ yes ☐ no

15 A human being can be under the control or influence of spiritual forces such as demons –

☐ yes ☐ no

16 When he lived on earth, Jesus Christ sinned, like other people –

☐ yes ☐ no

17 I believe that it is likely that Jesus was married and fathered children –

☐ yes ☐ no

18 I believe that Jesus Christ is the only avenue through which a person can get to heaven.

☐ yes ☐ no

(OPTIONAL)

NAME_____

AGE (< 20) (21-30) (31-40) (41-50) (51-60) (61-70) (71 >)

Church Affiliation (if any)_____

how long? – in years (<2) (3-5) (5-8) (8-12) (12-17) (17-23) (23-30) (30>)

ESSENTIAL BELIEFS SURVEY – PART II
 RevWPF@aol.com - June 2003
 Rev. W. P. Fillebrown – 7 River St. – Plymouth, MA 02360

AGREE - DISAGREE	AST (agree strongly)	ASW (agree somewhat)	DSW (disagree somewhat)	DST (disagree strongly)	DK (don't know)
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a. The Bible is totally accurate and authoritative in all it affirms -

[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
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b. I, personally, have a responsibility to tell other people my religious beliefs -

[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

c. If a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during their lifetime, they will earn a place in Heaven -

[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

d. It doesn't matter what religious faith you follow because they all teach the same lessons -

[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

e. After he was crucified and died, Jesus Christ did not return to life physically -

[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

f. All people experience the same outcome after death, regardless of their religious beliefs -

[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

g. There are some crimes, sins or other things that people might do that cannot be forgiven by God -

[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

h. Angels exist and influence people's lives -

[]	[]	[]	[]	[]
-----	-----	-----	-----	-----

i. The universe was originally created by God –

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

j. The whole idea of sin is outdated –

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

I would also welcome your thoughts and comments on this survey....

The survey contained no specific instructions. Respondents were free to answer as they chose. Many wrote comments after each question as well as in the section specifically identified for comments at the end of the survey. In some instances, respondents wrote in answers, as in PART 1, question 5 regarding attendance at worship. 1/week was not included in the survey. Many simply wrote in this response. Omitting this response was an oversight in the development of the survey, but it actually gave added value to the fact that many wrote it in. As a result, a value was assigned to this response and factored into the results of the section on Religious Practice.

THE OVERALL PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

The overall purpose of the survey was to measure, quantify, and compare the responses. The goal was to arrive at a “belief quotient” which would consist of

totaling the values of each section of the survey. This “belief quotient” could then be used to weigh the relative value of the questions that did not have a numerical value as well as the demographic information when available. The end result of this analysis is to obtain an idea of what the church might do to develop and deepen the faith walk of its constituents as well as how it might appeal to those outside the church to enter a more meaningful and lasting journey of faith.

The following is a break down of the survey into its various sections listing the numerical weights to each question.

SURVEY SECTIONS AND NUMERICAL WEIGHTS TO QUESTIONS

PART I-A – RELIGIOUS/PERSONAL (questions 1-3)

The questions in this section were not given a numeric value. They are strictly subjective in nature or for the purpose of information.

- 1 I consider myself to be a Christian - ☐ yes ☐ no ☐ other
- 2 I have been baptized - ☐ as an infant ☐ as a believer ☐ no
- 3 I see myself as having been a Christian -
☐ from birth ☐ since baptism ☐ since a particular date

PART 1-B – RELIGIOUS PRACTICE (questions 4-6)

- 4 I have received specific instruction as to what it means to know and live the Christian life –
- in the way of a catechism class, a confirmation class, or a new believers class –
☐ 1 yes ☐ 0 no ☐ -2 other

5 It is vital to my spiritual well-being to worship with my local, gathered congregation -

[3] more than once/week [1] once/month [0] less than once/month

(written in) - 1/week [2]

6 My stewardship commitment to the church that I attend is to -

[3] tithe [2] pledge [1] give regularly [0] give occasionally

[0] give in response to expressed need

The totals for this section range from 0 to 8.

PART 1-C - YES-NO QUESTIONS (questions 7-18)

7 I believe that when people are born, they are neither good nor evil; they make a choice between the two as they mature -

[0] yes [2] no

8 There are truths that are valid for all people, at all times, in all circumstances -

[2] yes [0] no [] other

9 It is possible to communicate with others after they die -

(indecisive - see below)

10 I believe that the Bible can only be correctly interpreted by people who have had years of intense training in theology -

[0] yes [2] no

11 The Bible, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths -

[0] yes [2] no

12 God is one Person in three separate and equal Persons – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit -

[2] yes [0] no

13 The devil, or Satan, is not a living entity, but a symbol of evil –

[0] yes [2] no

14 Every person has a soul that will live forever, either in God's presence or absence.

[2] yes [0] no

15 A human being can be under the control or influence of spiritual forces such as demons –

[2] yes [0] no

16 When he lived on earth, Jesus Christ sinned, like other people –

[0] yes [2] no

17 I believe that it is likely that Jesus was married and fathered children –

[0] yes [2] no

18 I believe that Jesus Christ is the only avenue through which a person can get to heaven.

[2] yes [0] no

The totals for this section range from 0 to 22.

SURVEY - PART II - AGREE-DISAGREE

AST (agree strongly)	ASW (agree somewhat)	DSW (disagree somewhat)	DST (disagree strongly)	DK (don't know)
----------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------------	-------------------------------	-----------------------

a. The Bible is totally accurate and authoritative in all it affirms –

[2]	[1]	[-1]	[-2]	[0]
-----	------	------	-------	-----

b. I, personally, have a responsibility to tell other people my religious beliefs –

[2]	[1]	[-1]	[-2]	[0]
-----	-----	------	------	-----

c. If a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during their lifetime, they will earn a place in Heaven –

[2]	[1]	[-1]	[-2]	[0]
-----	-----	------	------	-----

d. It doesn't matter what religious faith you follow because they all teach the same lessons –

[-2]	[-1]	[1]	[2]	[0]
------	------	-----	-----	-----

e. After he was crucified and died, Jesus Christ did not return to life physically –

[-2]	[-1]	[1]	[2]	[0]
------	------	-----	-----	-----

f. All people experience the same outcome after death, regardless of their religious beliefs – *Too vague - did not factor in*

g. There are some crimes, sins or other things that people might do that cannot be forgiven by God – *Too vague - did not factor in*

h. Angels exist and influence people's lives –

[2]	[1]	[-1]	[-2]	[0]
-----	------	------	-------	-----

i. The universe was originally created by God –

[2] [1] [-1] [-2] [0]

j. The whole idea of sin is outdated –

[-2] [-1] [1] [2] [0]

The total in this section ranges from (-16) to + 16.

The survey total, overall, ranges from –16 to 46. This end result is termed the “Total Belief Quotient”.

THE BASIS FOR THE FOUR SECTIONS

Each section of the survey served a particular purpose. The sections stand alone, in one sense, and at the same time stand in correspondence to one another. A consideration of each section and then some comments concerning how they inter-relate to one another.

PART I-A – RELIGIOUS/PERSONAL (questions 1-3)

These questions do not have a right or wrong response and as such it is not possible to assign a value to them. They are helpful from a comparative standpoint – i.e. Is there a relationship between any one of these responses and the total belief quotient?

Question 1 – I consider myself to be a Christian –

The importance of this question must not be overshadowed by the fact that it seems obvious. Only two of the respondents indicated that they were NOT Christians.

This tells me that there is a wide degree of latitude among those who identify themselves as Christians for any number of reasons.

Questions 2 & 3 – regarding baptism –

These questions work to determine the religious and cultural significance of what it means to be a Christian on the part of each respondent. Some respondents checked off more than one box for this question. That is reflected in the values for this question (see below).

PART 1-B - RELIGIOUS PRACTICE (questions 4-6)

Question 4 – specific instruction -

The value of this question stems from the need for specific instruction in the essentials of the faith. Such instruction involves history and polity, but addresses matters of biblical knowledge and faith as well. I was interested to know if there is a correspondence between a respondent's level of instruction and his/her total belief quotient.

Question 5 – the frequency of worship -

Woody Allen commented that "80% of success in life is just showing up." I have come to believe this to be true, hence the importance of this question. In considering the overall value of Religious Practice and the relative value of each of the questions within this particular section, the widest discrepancy in the overall total belief quotient existed in relation to worship attendance. I conclude from this that among the questions as to when a person was baptized, formal instruction, giving patterns, or worship attendance – that worship attendance is the most telling and decisive in terms of the development of essential belief. The other three questions are

interrelated, but worship stands above them. Below the differentiation (highest vs lowest) of the average total belief quotient for each response is shown:

baptism – 13 - (38.0-25.0) *instruction* – 12 - (32.8-20.8)

worship – 21.8 - (34.8-13.0) *giving* – 12.8 - (37.1-24.3)

These numbers indicate the importance of baptism relative to the other three categories.

Question 6 – regarding stewardship –

This question speaks to how a person's faith is expressed in tangible commitment. Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 7:21). In weighing the responses, I used the highest level of giving pattern reflected in any specific response. Where more than one box was checked, I used the highest response as the one upon which to place value.

The responses in these two sections are very telling, because there is, invariably, a gap between what a person says he believes and the actual expression of that belief. A person's true belief will be expressed in actions. Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:20). In the life of the church, people vote with their feet and with their wallets. This is reflected in their attendance, participation, and investment in the life and work of the church.

PART I-C - YES-NO QUESTIONS (questions 7-18)

This section requires that respondents make choices that are more definitive than many were comfortable with. Some felt limited by the Yes-No choices. Others

wanted a True-False format. Some openly expressed discomfort with the structure imposed in this section.

It is helpful to look at the questions individually:

Question 7 – deals with the issue of original sin

Question 8 – deals with the issue of ultimate or absolute truth

Question 9 – deals with communicating with the dead

This question showed itself to be rather nebulous. There is evidence in Scripture that communication with the dead is possible (i.e. the witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28), but the implications regarding the occult make this question problematic. Although the results of this question were compiled, it was not included in calculating the belief quotient for this section.

Question 10 – deals with the issue of interpretation of Scripture by an elite group of people as opposed to the “priesthood of all believers” and the availability of the Holy Spirit to lead all Christians in the truth of God.

Question 11 – addresses the place of the Bible in relation to other holy books.

Question 12 – speaks to the make up of the Trinity.

Questions 13 & 15 – deal with the Devil as a real or symbolic entity and more generally indicates a person’s understanding of spiritual reality and warfare.

Question 14 – speaks to the matter of eternal life and judgment.

Questions 16-18 – deals with the matter of Christology.

DEMOGRAPHICS

This section was optional and 11 respondents chose to remain anonymous. The main reason for this section was to be able to use the categories of age and of years

of involvement in the church as a point of comparison to the overall total belief quotient. The age category did produce some meaningful results, but the years of involvement category was not specific enough. Some responded in terms of their involvement throughout their lifetime, while others responded in terms of their most recent church involvement. This question needed to be more pointed and specific. As it is, the results were not very useful.

PART II - AGREE-DISAGREE – (questions a-j)

The questions stand on their own and serve as a correlative or a fail-safe to the questions in Part I. These questions were taken from a questionnaire produced by Barna Research Institute. Many respondents found the format confusing and suggested numerical response format (1-5) rather than being limited to Agree-Disagree.

SURVEY CATEGORIES

The survey questions fall into two broad categories. First, are questions that I developed myself. Second, are questions taken from survey material developed by Barna Research Group of Ventura, California (www.barna.org - all survey questions and results used with permission of BRI). The questions of my own developing were tailored to specifically postmodern concerns. The questions from the Barna Research (Survey-Barna-Basics1) were included so that the results of my survey questions could be compared with those from another source, which would provide some idea of the validity of my sample group and their responses when compared with those of Barna Research.

Below is a chart comparing my survey results with those of Barna Research in the “Yes-No” (Y/N) portion of the Essential Belief Survey:

CHART #1

in %	SURVEY N	SURVEY Y	BARNA N	BARNA Y
7 born w/o sin?	42.9	54	21	74
8 truth?	61.6	21.9	55	35
9 com. w/ dead?	86.8	13.2	39	51
10 special training Bible interp?	75	13.2	38	44
11 holy books same?	9.2	86.8	13	79
12 Trinity?	72.4	22.4	34	59
13 Devil not real?	10.5	82.9	12	79
14 eternal life?	22.4	75	38	54
15 spiritual influence?	79	15.8	50	42

(See Appendix 2 – page 187-188 for graphs of the above chart)

The Barna Research Survey draws from a broader sample base and contains many more responses than the Essential Belief Survey. However, two general observations may be drawn. First, the Essential Belief Survey results were by and

large on a higher scale than those of the Barna survey. But, interestingly, the general trend of the responses as indicated by the graph lines, is similar with the peaks and valleys on each graph corresponding roughly to one another. This correspondence affords confidence that the Survey sample is in keeping with Barna's results. (although perhaps possessing a higher degree of understanding with regard to orthodoxy or essential belief.)

A similar correspondence is evident in the "Agree-Disagree" Section of the Essential Belief Survey when it is compared to the Barna Survey results.

(See Appendix 2 – pages 189-192)

Once again, the peaks and valleys on each graph correspond roughly to one another. The agreement between the "Y-N" section and the "Agree-Disagree" section adds confidence to the credibility of the results of the Essential Belief Survey.

Another means of testing the validity of the survey and the appropriateness of the values assigned in each of the three quantifiable sections is to chart and graph those results. In this instance, clergy responses are included for the purpose of comparison.

CHART #2

questions 4-6 – total possible - 8

Section #2 Religious Practice Total	CLERGY	LAITY
0-2 7 laity	xxx	8.86
3-4 2 clergy 18 laity	24	29.61
5 3 clergy 23 laity	32	28.87
6 2 clergy 13 laity	36.5	30.35
7 5 clergy 13 laity	44.6	39.38
8 2 clergy 3 laity	44.5	44.67

CHART #3

questions 7-18 – total possible - 22

Section #3 Y-N	CLERGY	LAITY
0-10 1 clergy 8 laity	19	6.9
11-19 3 clergy 30 laity	30.7	24.3
20 2 clergy 19 laity	39	36.6
22 8 clergy 20 laity	42.5	41.3

CHART #4

questions a-j – total possible - 16

AGREE- DISAGREE	CLERGY	LAITY
less than 0 7 laity	0	6.29
0-3 1 clergy 13 laity	27	19.85
4-5 1 clergy 12 laity	19	26.42
6-9 1 clergy 9 laity	29	28.00
10-13 3 clergy 8 laity	32.67	34.00
14-15 3 clergy 14 laity	43.67	40.36
16 5 clergy 14 laity	45	42.71

(See Appendix 2 - pages 192-193 for graphs of the above charts)

The raw results of the Essential Belief Survey, Section #3 - (questions 7-18), are contained in the following charts:

CHART #5

7 born w/o sin?	8 truth?	9 com. w/ dead?	10 special training Bible interp?	11 holy books same?	12 Trinity?
--------------------	-------------	--------------------	--	---------------------------	----------------

no=33	no=4	no=45	no=66	no=57	no=7
yes=42	yes=69	yes=16	yes=10	yes=10	yes=66
other=2	other=3	other=12		other=9	other=3

no=42.86%	no=5.26%	no=61.64%	no=86.84%	no=75%	no=9.21%
yes=54.55%	yes=90.79%	yes=21.92%	yes=13.16%	yes=13.16%	yes=86.64%
other=2.6%	other=3.95%	other=16.44%		other=11.84%	other=3.95%

13 Devil not real?	14 eternal life?	15 spiritual influence?	16 X sinned?	17 X married?	18 X, only Way?
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no=55	no=8	no=17	no=60	no=66	no=21
yes=17	yes=63	yes=57	yes=12	yes=6	yes=51
other=4	other=5	other=2	other=4	other=5	other=4

no=72.37%	no=10.53%	no=22.37	no=78.95%	no=86.84%	no=27.63%
yes=22.37%	yes=82.89%	yes=75%	yes=15.79%	yes=7.89%	yes=67.11
other=5.26%	other=6.58%	other=2.63	other=5.26%	other=6.58%	other=5.26%

CHART #6

AGREE-DISAGREE QUESTIONS

a. Bible accurate?	b. tell others?	c. good works?	d. all religions same teachings?	e. res.-not physical?
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ast=44	ast=40	ast=9	ast=4	ast=7
asw=15	asw=18	asw=18	asw=14	asw=17
dsw=5	dsw=7	dsw=10	dsw=7	dsw=6
dst=7	dst=6	dst=30	dst=43	dst=36
o=1	o=2	o=7	o=5	o=8

ast=61.11%	ast=54.79%	ast=12.16%	ast=5.48	ast=9.46%
asw=20.83%	asw=23.38%	asw=24.32%	asw=19.18%	asw=22.97%
dsw=6.58%	dsw=9.09%	dsw=13.51%	dsw=9.59%	dsw=8.11%
dst=9.21%	dst=7.79%	dst=40.54%	dst=58.90%	dst=48.65%
other=1.32%	other=2.60%	other=9.46%	other=6.85%	other=10.81%

f. death - all same?	g. all sins, forgiven?	h. angels?	i. universe created by God?	j. sin outdated?
----------------------------	------------------------------	---------------	--------------------------------------	------------------------

ast=2	ast=7	ast=37	ast=59	ast=1
asw=13	asw=14	asw=15	asw=8	asw=11
dsw=5	dsw=14	dsw=6	dsw=2	dsw=6
dst=39	dst=29	dst=3	dst=2	dst=51
o=14	o=9	other=9	other=2	o=0

ast=2.74%	ast=9.59%	ast=52.86	ast=80.82%	ast=1.43%
asw=17.81%	asw=19.18%	asw=21.43	asw=10.96%	asw=15.71%
dsw=6.85%	dsw=19.18%	dsw=8.57	dsw=2.74%	dsw=8.57%
dst=53.42%	dst=39.73%	dst=4.29%	dst=2.74%	dst=72.86%
other=19.18%	other=12.33%	other=12.86%	other=2.74%	other=0

CONSENSUS AND NON-CONSENSUS

In the above tables, the highest percent answer is highlighted in yellow for each question. The raw results indicate a strong consensus for the following questions in Part II:

(8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17)

In Part II (AGREE-DISAGREE), a more general consensus may be derived by adding the (ast/asw) or the (dsw/dst) responses together. This would produce a strong consensus in the following questions in Part IV:

(b, h, i, j)

Some of the questions appeared to be vague or difficult to clearly answer. Question 9 as well as questions c, f, and g fall into this category. Question c. is difficult from the standpoint of those respondents who have been influenced by Catholic theology. Solving the debate between the efficacy of grace or works is beyond the scope of this paper. Question f., on death, was seen by some as a matter of if we all die vs. if we all share the same fate. For one, the answer could be “yes”, while for the other, the answer could be “no”. Question g. was confusing. Some looked at in the light that no sin too great for God to forgive. Others referred to the sin against the Holy Spirit as being the only unforgivable sin.

Questions 7 and 18 and questions a, d, and e are of particular importance.

Question 7 – addresses the nature of original sin.

Question 18 – addresses the exclusiveness of salvation in Christ.

Question a – addresses the accuracy (and the authority) of Scripture.

Question d – addresses the matter of the unique truth claims of
Scripture.

Question e – addresses the incarnational existence of Christ as seen
in an understanding of the nature of his resurrection.

These questions are further evaluated on the basis of the survey responses in two ways: The first is to examine the responses and to compare the answers of the respondents with their overall belief quotient.

Question 7 charts as follows:

CHART #7

#7 original sin	# resp.	ave. total
no	33	37.91
yes	42	24

Although the number of “yes” responses exceeds that of the “no” responses, the significant difference in the average total belief quotient between those who responded “no” (what is considered the correct answer) is such that a high degree of “essentiality” is in fact communicated in these results.

Question 18 charts as follows:

CHART #8

#18 X, the only Way	# of resp.	ave. total
no	21	18.38
yes	51	35.88

In this instance, the number of “yes” responses, although not exceeding 70% of the total responses, is not only a significant majority, but the average total (belief quotient) is significantly higher as well. This chart points to a high degree of “essentiality” in a different way than the previous chart.

Question a. charts as follows:

CHART #9

a. Bible accurate?	# of resp.	ave. total
ast	44	36.90
asw	15	25.40
dsw	5	19.8
dst	7	9.71

Here again, the “ast” responses (the correct response) make up 61.1% of the responses. However, the relative value of those responses is very high when weighed against the average total of the other responses. Also when the “asw” responses are added to the “ast” responses, the general agreement and the corresponding, combined average total reflect a clear “essentiality” with regard to this question.

Question d. charts as follows:

CHART #10

d. all religions same teachings?	# of resp.	ave. total
ast	4	15
asw	14	25.07
dsw	7	30.57
dst	43	35.84
dk	3	14.67

Here again, the “dst” responses (the correct response), represents less than 60% of the total responses, but those responses are relatively high when weighed with reference to the average total. General agreement further substantiates the “essentiality” of this question when the “dsw” responses are added to the “dst” responses.

Question e. charts as follows:

CHART #11

question e. resurrection not physical?	# of resp.	ave. total
ast	7.00	15.14
asw	16.00	24.25
dsw	6.00	28.83
dst	36.00	39.00
dk	8.00	18.50

The “dst” responses (the correct response) are less than 50% of the total responses, but the average total (belief quotient) of those responses is the highest of all. In addition, not only are the “dsw” responses also second in terms of average total, the addition of the “dst” and the “dsw” responses once again tip the balance of general agreement.

FAIL-SAFE QUESTIONS

There is a degree of overlap among the sections of the Essential Belief Survey that serves as a Fail-Safe mechanism to ensure overall consistency. Where there is a discrepancy or a clear consensus is not found, the comparison of these “Fail-Safe” questions yields a greater amount of information regarding the “essentiality” of the responses in question.

This approach compares the above questions (questions 7, 18, a, d, and e) with their corresponding “Fail-Safe” questions to come up with an agreement ratio. This

ratio sheds light on the deeper value of the particular question as viewed in correlation to its counterpart.

The questions involved match up in the following manner:

Part I

Question #7 – original sin .

Question #18 – Christ the only way.

Part II

Question c – the value of works.

Question d – all religious faiths the same.

Part II

Question a – the accuracy and authority of the Bible

Question e – regarding the physical resurrection.

Part I

Question 11 – holy books as different expressions of truth.

Question 16 – as to whether or not Christ sinned like others.

Yet another interesting “Fail-Safe” comparison exists between Question 15, as to “whether or not a person can be under the control of spiritual forces such as demons” – and Question h, concerning the existence of angels.

It is of value to go into some detail in making these comparisons as they give greater validity to the relative value of the survey responses. A chart comparing Question #7 and Question c can be found in Appendix 2.

The overall agreement ratio gives an indication of how the two questions correspond to one another. A relatively low overall agreement ratio indicatives

contradiction or confusion between the two questions. A correspondingly high overall agreement ratio indicates understanding of the two questions under consideration. The low agreement between Question #7 and Question C reveals confusion on the part of the respondents.

Beyond the overall agreement ratio, a positive and a negative consistency ratio can be calculated. The positive consistency ratio is made up of a comparison between the correct (positive) responses in Part I as cross-referenced to their counterparts in Part II. The negative consistency ratio does the same with regard to incorrect (negative) responses.

The consistency ratios for Question #7 and Question C. are as follows:

CHART #14

#7	(correct ans.) no/disgree		C	
original sin?	no	yes	saved by good works?	
	1	8	ast	
	7	11	asw	
	2	8	dsw	
	22	8	dst	
	1	2	dk	
	33	37		
	24	70	34.30%	
	overall agreement ratio			
no/disagree	24	33	72.72%	positive consistency ratio
yes/agree	19	37	51.40%	negative consistency ratio

This comparison is charted, graphed, and explained in detail in Appendix 2 – pages 194-197. This analysis was conducted for all of the additional comparisons.

In this #7/c comparison, “no/disagree” is the most “correct” answer – and “yes/agree” is the least “correct” answer .

of those who answered “no” to question 7 :

- 2 answered “dsw” (disagree somewhat) to question C
- 22 answered “dst” (disagree strongly) to question C

24 out of 33 “no” responses disagreed either somewhat or strongly

producing a 72.72% **positive consistency ratio**. (24/33 = 72.72%)

of those who answered “yes” to question 7:

- 8 answered “ast” (agree strongly) to question C
- 11 answered “asw” (agree somewhat) to question C

19 out of 37 “yes” responses agreed either somewhat or strongly producing a 51.40% **negative consistency ratio** (19/37 = 51.40%).

Although there is a low overall agreement, the consistency ratios provide a relative measurement of the consistency with which the respondents have answered, in this case - “no/disagree” vs. “yes/agree”.

Using this approach, the remaining charts are as follows:

CHART #15

#11	(correct ans.) no/agree	A		
holy books all same	yes	no	Bible accurate	
	5	38	ast	
	1	10	asw	
	1	4	dsw	
	2	3	dst	
	9	55		
	48	64	75%	overall agreement ratio
no/agree	48	55	87.27%	positive consistency ratio
yes/disagree	3	9	33.33%	negative consistency ratio

CHART #16

#18	(correct ans.) yes/disagree	D		
X, the only way	yes	no	all religions, same teachings	
	2	2	ast	
	8	5	asw	
	3	4	dsw	
	35	6	dst	
	1	1	dk	
	49	18		
	36	67	56.72%	agreement ratio
yes/disagree	38	49	77.55%	positive consistency ratio
no/agree	7	18	38.90%	negative consistency ratio

CHART #17

#16	(correct ans.) no/disagree	E		
X sinned, like others	yes	no	X, not raised physically	
	3	3	ast	
	3	11	asw	
	0	6	dsw	
	2	34	dst	
	3	4	dk	
	11	58		
	40	69	58%	overall agreement ratio
no/disagree	40	58	69%	positive consistency ratio
yes/agree	6	11	54.50%	negative consistency ratio

The comparison of Question #18 and Question D as well as that of Question #16 and Question E show a solid agreement ratio (56.72% and 58% respectively), one that is significantly higher than the comparison of Question #7 and Question C (34.4%). The comparison of Question #11 and Question A is the highest of all (75.00%), indicating the strongest correlation of all between these two questions. These values are indicative of the Fail-Safe relationship between two corresponding questions as answered by the survey respondents. In each instance, the positive and negative consistency ratios, and the difference between them, give additional credence to the “essentiality”, as seen by the respondents.

Another pair of questions that lend themselves to the “Fail-Safe” comparison are Question #15 (concerning demonic influence) and Question H (regarding the existence of angels). To be consistent in one’s understanding of spiritual reality and spiritual warfare, these two questions should have a high degree of correlation. The chart comparing these two questions lays out as follows:

CHART #18

#15	(correct ans.) yes/agree	H		
demon influence?	yes	no	angels exist?	
	31	6	ast	
	16	1	asw	
	3	3	dsw	
	0	3	dst	
	5	3	dk	
	55	16		
	47	71	57.80%	overall agreement ratio
yes/agree	47	55	85.45%	positive consistency ratio
no/disagree	6	16	37.50%	negative consistency ratio

Here again a solid indication of agreement exists, particularly when compared to the other agreement ratios. This agreement is substantiated when viewed in light of the positive and negative consistency ratios.

Generally speaking, the agreement ratios demonstrate a deeper level of “essentiality” on the part of the questions involved. It would have been nice to have this deeper correspondence reflected in all of the questions compared, but if that were the case, this writer could be accused of writing the survey in such a way that the answers dictated responses that fell into more acceptable limits.

SURVEY RESPONSES AS A FUNCTION OF AGE

The survey can also be used to show the essential belief reflected by the respondents as a function of age. This is depicted in chart (and graph) form, including responses by clergy and laity.

CHART #19

	CLERGY	LAITY
30 or less 6 laity	xxx	38.33
31-40 1 clergy 6 laity	46.00	22.50
41-50 4 clergy 16 laity	35.75	33.94
51-60 3 clergy 23 laity	44.33	33.61
61-70 4 clergy 12 laity	37.75	25.92
71 or more 1 clergy 7 laity	29.00	23.00

(See Appendix 2 – page 192 for a graph of the above chart)

Several observations can be made in looking at the above chart. First, the clergy are, for the most part, consistently higher than the laity. Second, in the latter half of the graph, the general trend for clergy and laity is similar, with the average total peaking and then trailing off as age increases. I'm not sure why this is, but perhaps, as people get older they feel less of a need to be theologically defined. Increased life-experience could also be a factor. Also noteworthy is the average total among those less than 30 years old is relatively high. The limits of my sample are evident in this consideration. A greater number of younger people and a representation of younger clergy would have produced more meaningful results. It would be interesting to know how these general trends compare with surveys done using larger samples.

EVALUATION OF THE SURVEY AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The survey could be improved in a number of ways.

All but two respondents identified themselves as Christians. All but four respondents indicated they believed that there are truths that are valid for all people, at all times, in all circumstances. This raises a question regarding the make-up of the sample. It does not seem to reflect the contemporary, postmodern inclination toward relativism. A sampling that included more responses from those who do not deem themselves to be Christians and more people under 30 years old, or even under 20 years old, would have improved the survey. The results evident in my survey are not surprising given that the sample is drawn, primarily, from people with local church backgrounds and involvements.

Another area where the survey could be improved is in the choice of questions. Several questions were vague or confusing. Based on the comments that respondents wrote on the surveys, Question #9, communicating with the dead, Question #10, who can rightly interpret the Bible, and Question G, some sins, crimes or other things people might do that cannot be forgiven by God, were difficult for the respondents to answer. These questions reflect differences in religious tradition more than differences in essential faith. I question the extent to which these questions actually contribute to a true understanding and reflection of essential belief.

A question that was not included in the survey, that might have provided some telling feedback on essential faith, has to do with the Return of Christ. This is an essential doctrine or tenet of Christian faith, and given the historical and contemporary interest in this subject, it would have been helpful to include a question along these lines in Part I of the survey and a corresponding, Fail-Safe question in Part II.

Survey results indicated areas that need to be focused upon when considering essential faith. There was a good deal of inconsistency in the area of Christology as seen in Question #16, as to whether or not Christ sinned like other people, Question #17, as to whether or not Christ was married and had children, Question #18, as to whether Christ is the only avenue through which a person can get to heaven, and Question E, regarding the bodily resurrection of Christ. The question of the bodily resurrection of Christ is especially important as it, above all of the others, establishes

his claim to deity and also becomes the crowning demonstration of his sinless character and divine nature.

Another pivotal question concerns Question #7, regarding original sin. Responses for this question had the least amount of agreement. It could be that respondents are unable or unwilling to grasp this foundational doctrine. The thought of humankind not being basically good is not popular, especially when applied with reference to the innocence of children. The current trend away from personal responsibility also contributes to the confusion surrounding this question. Perhaps, most of all, this question reflects the individualism and self-determinism that is so much a part of western culture today. This point of view is further borne out in light of the disparity and inconsistency with regard to Question C, concerning the relationship between faith and works. Over 36% of the responses to Question C indicated that, "If a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during their lifetime, they will earn a place in Heaven." One reason for this response could possibly be the influence of Catholic theology and the issue of faith and works. Not all of those who responded favorably regarding the efficacy of works for salvation are Catholics. Unfortunately, the demographic information in this survey is not capable of determining this relationship.

The issue of spiritual reality and spiritual warfare is also an area of some ambiguity. There was significant inconsistency among the answers to Question #13, regarding the existence of Satan as an entity or a symbol of evil, Question #15, regarding the influence of spiritual forces, and Question H, concerning the existence of angels. This response is a direct indicator of knowledge of the Bible and adherence to its teaching on the spirit world as compared to the popular fascination

with angels and their place as guardians. It seems that people like the thought of “good” spirit beings, but not the thought of “evil” spirit beings. This extends even to the belief that Satan, a spirit entity clearly represented and portrayed in the Scriptures, is symbolic as a product of the human mind and imagination, not a real spiritual entity. It would be useful to compare Question #13, regarding the reality of Satan, with Question J, as to whether or not the whole idea of sin is outdated.

CHART #20

#13	(correct ans.) no/disagree	H		
Satan symbol or entity	yes	no	sin outdated	
	1	0	ast	
	4	8	asw	
	3	3	dsw	
	5	43	dst	
	2	1	dk	
	15	55		
	46	70	65.71%	overall agreement ratio
no/disagree	46	55	83.64%	positive consistency ratio
yes/disagree	5	15	33.33%	negative consistency ratio

The overall agreement ratio is surprisingly high to me, and the consistency ratios work to only further substantiate the solid consensus reflected by the survey respondents.

CONCERNS, CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS

An attempt has been made to develop a survey that is both valid and meaningful. In gathering, quantifying and analyzing the response information, the survey's value has been demonstrated.

A number of areas of concern come to light based on the information that has come out of this survey. They possess high degrees of “essentiality”.

First, the two most significant areas with regard to religious practice are baptism and worship involvement. Baptism (Questions #2 & #3) is important from the standpoint that an individual takes ownership of his or her faith. Those who were baptized as believers and those who were baptized as infants AND as believers, scored significantly higher in their overall totals.

CHART #21

baptized as:	clergy	laity
OTHER 2 laity	0	16
INFANT 2 clergy 42 laity	29	25.36
BELIEVER 7 clergy 18 laity	37.14	33.12
INFANT & BELIEVER 4 clergy 16 laity	41.75	38.4

(See Appendix 2 – page 197 for graph of the above chart.)

Many of these same people were the product of the evangelical revivalism that sees a person's Christian life beginning at that particular moment when they commit themselves to Christ.

There is also a high correspondence regarding overall total in reference to worship attendance.

CHART #22

worship frequency	clergy	laity
LESS THAN 1/MON. 1 clergy 3 laity	29	13
1/MONTH 1 clergy 12 laity	19	23.58
1/WK 15 laity	x	26.43
MORE THAN 1/WK 12 clergy 42 laity	40.17	35.63

(See Appendix 2 – page 198 for graph of the above chart)

Worship is a place where many receive a large portion of their instruction. It offers a different, and perhaps more dynamic and affective, setting for learning than a formal learning environment. The conclusion drawn is that God-centered worship and correct and consistent observance of the sacrament of baptism make a large

contribution to essential faith. It would be of interest to compare observance of the sacrament of communion (meaning and frequency) as a function of total belief quotient.

Although it's not within the scope of this survey, it would also be worthwhile to determine if stewardship patterns are a product or a result of essential faith rather than a direct, contributing factor as in the case of worship and baptism. This is not to minimize the importance of formal religious instruction as a vital component in developing essential faith, although the differential for religious instruction ($32.8 - 20.8 = 12$) was the lowest among the four categories listed (see page 15).

A second area of concern comes out of Part I and Part II regarding the doctrine of Scripture. Basic to a Christian worldview and to essential faith is the knowledge that the Bible is divine in its origin, that it is not "Man's word about God", but "God's Word about man." This is especially important given the tendency of human beings to want to make the Bible say what they want it to say. Like W. C. Fields, who, near the end of his life, was asked why he was reading the Bible so much, said, "Looking for loopholes..." A second reason that this matter is important is because of the popular tendency toward tolerance and universalism in the inclusion of non-Christian religions under the redemptive plan of God. This has been more pronounced since the terrorist attacks in the U.S. on September 11, 2001 and is seen by many as a possible hedge with reference to the ongoing tensions among Christians, Islamics, and Jews. In an effort to embrace tolerance, many have questioned and subsequently sold out on the essential beliefs of Christian faith.

Question A, regarding the accuracy of the Bible, was framed in terms of the Bible's accuracy and authority in all that it affirms. This wording comes from the statement of faith produced at the Lausanne Conference on Evangelism in 1974. To speak in terms of the validity of what Scripture "affirms" takes the discussion out of the realm of requiring that the Bible be viewed as a science book or a history book. This language comes out of a personal preference. It seems to be a meaningful way to frame the discussion, although some respondents to the survey found the phrasing difficult.

A third area of concern involves the Person of Christ. Christ is the hinge of redemptive history and the thread of continuity in all of Scripture, in its message of promise and fulfillment. To ask, "Who is Christ?" is crucial. Evangelism can be defined as inviting people to consider this question and helping them to answer it for themselves.

FINAL SUMMATION

This survey demonstrates the need to see the development of essential faith as a matter of both individual and corporate concern. Each individual is responsible before God to cultivate and grow his or her Christian life and understanding, but it is best done in the context of and under the auspices of the corporate life of the church. Certain approaches and activities stand out, such as worship and observance of the sacraments, but they are part of a larger mix that encompasses the fullness of the fellowship that is enjoyed in the body of Christ. That fellowship involves people of all sorts, including age, religious and spiritual experience, and background and longevity in relation to the local church.

The single most effective action that the Church/church can take in relation to postmodern generations, is to incorporate them into the fellowship of the faith community. The church must respond to their need for relationship with God and with other pilgrims who share the quest of faith, and to lovingly, accurately, and consistently answer their questions regarding Christian faith as well as to help them formulate and answer the additional questions that will inform their faith over the course of a lifetime.

The “content” of faith must have a “context” in order to be effectively communicated in spirit and in truth.

CHAPTER FOUR

Practical Application – Bird’s Eye View of the Bible

BIRD’S EYE VIEW OF THE BIBLE - INTRODUCTION

The work of this thesis has been done with the life and spiritual well-being of the local church in mind at all times. Part 1 (Theological Framework/Literature Review) lays a biblical, exegetical, philosophical, and cultural foundation for the practical elements that follow.

In developing the thesis overall, two realizations surfaced. The first is the extent to which this author has been steeped in modernity while at the same time manifesting numerous elements that are sympathetic (even if unaware) to postmodernity. These elements include presenting the Gospel in a way that is not formulaic or stilted, an emphasis on pre-evangelism rather than trying to ‘score’ evangelistically by obtaining decisions for Christ, and utilizing the strengths and opportunities created by being part of a vital community of faith. People are incorporated and faith is cultivated in a way that is comprehensive, engaging, and balanced at the same time.

The second realization has to do with the local church as it stands as the focal point of ministry in reference to this thesis. As a traditional, mainline church the long-standing members are more modern than they are postmodern. Younger families, teenagers, and children are inclined in a more postmodern direction although they are largely unaware of the influences at work that cause them to be that way. They are simply a part of the culture that surrounds them.

The survey that was developed in Chapter 3 of this thesis was administered largely to people connected with Chiltonville Congregational Church. The nature of the survey is to produce quantifiable results and to compare and contrast those results. Modernity would view this as a kind of marketing survey that could then be used to apply the proper “church growth” techniques to ensure success. This is not the intended purpose of the survey. Instead, it works to provide a sense of the “situatedness” or the “positionality” of the church people individually and collectively. This attitude and approach lends itself to the design and intention of Bird’s Eye View of the Bible (BEV). BEV is open to criticism in that it is more modern than it is postmodern because to a large degree, it is propositional. This actually lends itself to greater effectiveness given the make-up of the particular church involved. The approach taken in BEV is balanced by presenting it in a mentoring relationship. This allows the presenter to tailor-make the material and be acutely responsive to the questions and concerns of those with whom s/he is working. BEV is also balanced and effective because of the use of story. Stories are an important part of the formal material, and mentors and participants are encouraged to “share their stories” throughout BEV. Beyond this, because BEV is done as a part of a larger church setting, it becomes a baseline for theological understanding and a launching platform for continued questioning, discussion, and spiritual formation.

Bird’s Eye View of the Bible (BEV) draws its concept from two different sources. The first is the book Christianity Is Jewish⁸⁰. Edith Schaeffer gives a kind of “fly-by” look at Christian faith. Taking a panoramic view of the Bible is very helpful in terms

⁸⁰ *Christianity Is Jewish*, Edith Schaeffer - L’Abri Fellowship, 1975,

of gaining a sense of its overall message. It enables the Bible reader to better fit the additional pieces into the framework that is developed. BEV takes the idea a step further in using an owl as a logo. Because owls are wise, inquisitive (who?), and observant, they represent all of the things that serious students need to bring to their inquiries.

The basic approach to BEV is drawn from *Discipleship/Evangelism - A Personalized Home Bible Study Course in Four Lessons for Lay Witness*.⁸¹ Discipleship/Evangelism seeks to cultivate interest by appealing to the overall significance, popularity, and lasting value of the Bible. Four sessions affords the time to engage students of the material in some depth while at the same time not being so arduous or time consuming as to make people reluctant to be involved. A departure from the original approach came in the form of presenting the material and working through with a mentor. Rather than being a self-directed study, the material is more focused, more directed, and more responsive to the specific questions, needs, and interests of the student(s) when offered on a person-to-person basis. Ideally, the material would be presented one-on-one or one-on-two – in the home of the student(s). This is the place where people are the most comfortable, where an open atmosphere can be established, and, consequently, the material can unfold in the most effective way.

BEV seeks to accomplish a number of things. First, it encourages an examination of the Bible on its own terms, in its own context, and in its own way. this allows the Bible to be accepted for what it says and does not say about itself rather than on the

⁸¹ *Discipleship Evangelism – A Personalized Home Bible Study Course in Four Lessons for Lay Witness*, Kenneth Stephens, Harvest Publishers, 1978 – copyright expired (per publisher) – able to quote freely.

basis of a particular person's opinion or speculation. Second, BEV aims to provide good information. Many who are critical of biblical faith have never read the Scriptures. BEV encourages them to look at the Bible for themselves. Texts in bold print are examined in the course of the student/mentor relationship. Other texts are left for the student to read and study between sessions. BEV is designed to consider the Bible and biblical faith in a framework that moves beyond a strictly modernistic/empirical approach. This has been the modus operandi of the evangelical-revivalistic movement for well over a century. An approach that seeks to establish prepositional/objective truth will simply not fly with people who possess a postmodern mindset. They do not reject truth outright. Rather they view a scientific-empirical approach to truth as being insufficient or inadequate. To this end, BEV seeks to present the quest for a deeper understanding of biblical faith as an adventure that a person enters into. In Matthew 16:13-17, Jesus asks his disciples who other say that he is. They give a variety of answers. Then he focuses the question more personally by asking, "Who do you say that I am?" BEV operates on the assumption that this is the most important question that can be asked. The evangelistic task is to encourage others ask the question with honesty and courage, and then to help them answer it for themselves. BEV works to raise the question of God, the possibility that God has spoken, the ultimate importance of God's communication with humankind, the nature of that communication, and the response that is called for.

The essential responsibility of the BEV mentor is to encourage students to let the Bible speak for itself, while at the same time offering a personal, authentic witness to the reality of faith in the life of an interested, engaged, and caring individual.



BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE BIBLE - 1

THE BIBLE – ITS PLACE AND ITS PURPOSE

THE QUESTION OF GOD

Everyone believes something. Even to believe nothing is to believe something. Everyone has a worldview – a way of understanding reality that enables us to live in the world. The Christian worldview begins with, *“In the beginning God.”*

Any real consideration of the Bible must begin with the Question of God. If an a priori understanding is that God does not exist (atheism) or that God, as Creator, is set apart from the creation (deism), or that God is in everything (pantheism), then there is no need to continue. The Bible draws a picture of the Creator God who continues to reach out in love to the creation.

Consider the following statement – *If there is a God and if that God has spoken, there is nothing more important than listening to what that God has to say.*

Welcome to a consideration of a most amazing book. The Bible is not a history book or a science book. It is more like a laboratory notebook observing and describing God's relationship with humanity over time. The Bible begins with an assertion, “In the beginning, God...” This assertion cannot be proven empirically; to attempt to do so goes beyond the scope of science and intellect. Rather than speak of the “proven-ness” of the Bible, we will address it in terms of its plausibility and consistency – based not so much on the opinion of others, but more centrally to the claims that it makes for itself. Throughout, in the back of our minds, will be the question, “If God has spoken...?” If you are open to this possibility, then let's proceed with the investigation and whatever adventure will come as a result.

THE BIBLE – ITS PURPOSE

The God of the Bible is the Creator God. The reality of the Creator God is evidenced in a creation that is teeming with life (Psalm 19:1-4, Romans 1:20). The universe, the world, even humankind stands as evidence to the life-giving God. All of creation is inclined toward life. But life is not limited to the parameters of birth and death. As human beings, created in the image of God, we are eternal. In this, the Bible shows us the way to eternal life in relationship to the God of love.

If God has spoken...

Simply put, the purpose of the Bible is to give us a glimpse of that which is eternal and help us to lay hold of it for ourselves. This involves a kind of “lifting of the veil” between God and ourselves. We need this disclosure because, as in a relationship with a friend, there are things that we cannot know about another person unless they are disclosed to us. The Bible is just such a disclosure.

Definition of the Word -

The word "Bible" simply means "book". It is one supreme and incomparable book. It surpasses other books in authority, antiquity, literary style, and popularity.

This study about the origin of the Bible will help us understand why the Bible is so extraordinary. It will help us see why no human mind has ever fully comprehended the message of the Bible or fully measured its value.

I. INTRODUCTORY FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE

A. THE AGE OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is older than any other book. The earliest written portions of Scripture date back more than 3,300 years. However, its message has been fresh and relevant in every age and generation. Its pages are still producing new gems of truth, even to those who study them the most.

B. THE DEMAND FOR THE BIBLE

The Bible is by far the most widely circulated book in the world. Since 1804, more than 800,000,000 Bibles and Scripture portions have been issued according to the British and Foreign Bible Societies. Every year more than 22,000,000 copies of the complete Bible and New Testament are circulated around the globe. Some 80,000 copies of the Bible are sold daily. It has been translated more than any other book, with new translations added annually. The following figures reflect this steady growth:

In 1455 A.D. the Bible was the first book ever printed (Johann Gutenberg)

In 1500 A.D. the Bible had been printed in 14 languages

In 1600--about 40 languages

In 1800--about 72 languages

In 1900--about 567 languages

In 1937--about 1,000 languages

In 1977--about 1,603 languages

In 1986--over 2,000 languages

In 2004—over 2300 languages

(Mainz – the Gutenberg museum – map of Europe – how the printing press fueled the Reformation – many contend that the computer and the internet are a technological advance on a similar scale)

The need is still great! Wycliffe Bible translators list a total of 5,445 languages in the world of which over 3,000 need Scripture translations. These languages represent over 300,000,000 people without the printed Word of God.

Historically, the Scriptures stand alone. We have more manuscripts of Biblical material than any other ancient document (over 25,000 items, as opposed to the runner-up, Homer's Illiad, with 643).

The Bible is also incredibly accurate, and cross-referenced perfectly with other historic discoveries in the same time period. Robert Dick Wilson, former Professor of Semitic Philology at Princeton University, states that, over 4000 years, Old Testament data has been transmitted with the most minute accuracy. Mathematically, it is one chance in 750×10^{21} that this is mere circumstance.

C. THE UNIQUENESS OF THE BIBLE

The Bible has set a standard for law and morality. The Ten Commandments continue to be the basis for civil law throughout the world.

It has the power to transform lives.

It speaks with authority "This is what the Lord says." (Isaiah 42:5).

It remains indestructible and living despite the many violent attacks waged against it over the centuries.

II. THE SUPERNATURAL ORIGIN OF SCRIPTURE

We will now proceed to study the two areas that intertwine to make the Bible such an amazing book, *inspiration* and *revelation*. Unless we understand both of these areas we will never grasp the truth about the origin of the Bible.

A. INSPIRATION- Key verse: 2 Timothy 3:16

The word "inspiration" means "God-breathed". All Scripture is God-breathed. Every word, every line was placed on the original parchments in complete agreement with the will of God. The veritable author/Author of the Bible is God.

Inspiration is then the process by which human authors were used by God to write accurately that which was revealed and recalled. The Bible is the Word of God written in the words of humankind.

God used human authors to write down the words He wanted. He watched over them as they wrote so no errors would be recorded - according to 2 Peter

1:19-21. Those who penned the Scriptures were chosen by God from different cultures, classes, ages, and professions. It is interesting to note how varied were the professions of these people. Among them were prophets, kings, officials, ministers, shepherds, priests, fishermen, theologians, judges, and a tax collector.

Consider some of the individuals and notice how well suited their lives and personalities were for their writings:

David - was a shepherd boy, who wrote most of the Psalms. Perhaps the most loved psalm David wrote was Psalm 23, the Shepherd Psalm.

Moses - was a man raised in the courts of the Egyptian leaders, later to become the leader of the nation, Israel.

Solomon - was a wise and worldly King of Israel. He wrote the book of wisdom, Proverbs.

Daniel - was a prophet, who was prepared in the courts of a heathen king. He wrote on international history and prophecy.

Paul - was a brilliant man, who was trained in law. He wrote concerning the legal aspects of justification in the book of Romans.

Forty different individuals wrote the Scriptures during a 1500-year period, yet there is not one contradiction in their writing. Discrepancies alleged by critics of the Bible have proven to be misinterpretations caused by taking statements out of context. How did these people know what to write? The answer to this question is found by studying the meaning of "Revelation".

B. REVELATION

Revelation is the activity of God in communicating truth to those who authored/wrote the Bible.

The key verse is 2 Peter 1:20,21. It tells us that God revealed His ideas to each writer.

God used various methods and instruments to reveal the Scriptures to His chosen authors (see Hebrews 1:1-3)

Direct voice - God visibly wrote certain truths Himself (Exodus 31:18). God spoke verbally to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-4), Moses (Exodus 7:8), Jesus at his baptism (Matthew 3:13-17), and Paul (Acts 18:9).

Dreams - God used dreams as a channel through which He revealed prophetic truths (Daniel 2:1-49). God also used dreams to communicate his truth to Jacob, Joseph (OT), a baker, a cupbearer, Pharaoh, Isaiah, Joseph (NT), and the Magi.

People - The personal experiences and spiritual lives of individuals were used by God (Psalm 51).

The Natural World - The universe that God created declared Him (Psalm 19:1-6, Romans 1:19-23).

Historical Events - God used the events of history to reveal His will. The Old Testament Books - Genesis through Esther.

Angelic visitation – (Genesis 32:22-32) – Jacob wrestles with the angel of the Lord, which was representative of God's own presence (see 32:30 esp.) – also, the angel Gabriel visited Mary (Luke 1:26-37). See Isaiah 63:7-9 – *the angel of God's presence*.

Other unusual ways God communicated with people -

God spoke to Moses through the fire of the burning bush (Exodus 3:2)

God communicated with Belshazzar with writing on a wall (Daniel 5:5-9)

With Balaam by way of a talking donkey (Numbers 22:21-35)

God led the people of Israel with a pillar of cloud and fire (Exodus 13:21,22)

God delivered Jonah to the shores of Nineveh by way of a fish (Jonah 2)

And God speaks to us by way of his Son (Hebrews 1:1,2)

C. WISDOM AND REVELATION – THE DIFFERENCE

It is true that the Bible is full of wisdom literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs), but it is more than a guide book for wise living.

Revelation is from God, the likes of which we never would have thought of ourselves. How else can we explain the things God has required which seem to be beyond reason?

Instructing Noah to build an ark when there was no sign of rain (Genesis 6:9ff)

Asking Abraham to sacrifice his son whom God had earlier promised (Genesis 22:1,2)

The strange military tactics used to take the city of Jericho (Joshua 6)

Telling Gideon to reduce his army from 32,000 to 300 before engaging the Midianites (Judges 7)

A young woman, who had never “known” (had sexual relations with) a man, explaining to her intended husband that she was with child by the Holy Spirit.

The crowning revelation is the Incarnation (God in the flesh) and the resurrection. All other religions smack of human origin and are essentially works related. The resurrection is unique in that it is something, the likes of which, we never would have thought of on our own.

D. SUMMARY OF TERMS

Revelation is God's Activity in conveying divine truth to humanity.

It is a “lifting of the veil” to know who God is, what God's motivations are, and to clearly see the consistency of God's attitude and actions toward us.

Inspiration is God's activity in producing a record of His revealed and recalled truth. It is many stories and one Story at the same time. And it has stood the test of time.

III. EVIDENCE OF THE SUPERNATURAL ORIGIN OF SCRIPTURE

A. THE UNITY OF SCRIPTURE

The Bible is one book even though there are 66 Books. The first book was written approximately 1425 B.C. and the last around 95 A.D. This is in itself a tremendous obstacle to the unity of any book. Yet the Bible is an orderly and harmonious account of the whole history of God's dealings with people.

B. THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

If there is a God and He has spoken, then what He says is authoritative. God is the Source of all authority and that authority is expressed in revelation.

The whole tone of Scripture is that of final authority (Isaiah 8:20).

That authority is indestructible (Matthew 24:35).

C. FULFILLED PROPHECY

Only God knows and can perfectly predict the future. There are numerous instances in Scripture where God predicts the future precisely.

Isaiah prophesied the virgin conception of Jesus (Isaiah 7:14). This prophecy was fulfilled 700 years after it was given (Matthew 1:18,22,23).

Micah predicted the exact birthplace of the Messiah (Micah 5:2). This prophecy was fulfilled 500 years after it was given.

David predicted Christ's crucifixion in detail hundreds of years before this method of execution was ever used (Psalm 22).

Isaiah foretold Christ's suffering and atonement 700 years before Christ's death (Isaiah 53:4-6).

D. THE TESTIMONY OF CHRIST CONCERNING THE SCRIPTURES

This is the crowning proof of the inspiration of the Bible. Christ said, "In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." (John 18:37).

He believed the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5:17,18).

He believed in Solomon (Matthew 6:29).

He believed on Moses (Matthew 8:4).

He believed on Abraham (Matthew 8:11).

He believed in the account of Sodom and Gomorrah (Matthew 10:15).

He quoted the Old Testament Scriptures (Matthew 21:13,16,42, 22:28-33,36-40)

Jesus went so far as to proclaim the eternally enduring nature of his own words, directly, and all of Scripture, indirectly, when he said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my word will never pass away." (Matthew 24:35)

IV. THE BIBLE – ITS PURPOSE

The uniqueness of the Bible is demonstrated in that - more than our interpreting it, it interprets us. The purpose of the Bible is to reveal and lead us ever more deeply into the life and Joy that God desires and intends for those whom he has created, and even for the creation in its entirety.

In the book of Ecclesiastes (3:11) we are told that God has "placed eternity in our hearts." We have a longing and a capacity to know and love God in an eternal sense of the word. It's written on our hearts.

Behind the design, there is a Designer. Behind a work of art, there is an Artist. If there is a story, there must be a Story-teller. The Bible is the story of God's relatedness to humankind. It reveals not only God's mind, but His heart toward us as well. It tells us that our existence is not simply a function of Time + Matter + Chance. It tells us that we are a part of a Story that is larger than our "selves", that has existed before Time began, before we were born. It tells us of our place and our unique role in the Story. And it speaks of a glorious future that awaits those who know and love God.

The Bible tells us how we can know and love God.

IS THE BIBLE EXHAUSTIVE?

The Bible does not purport to answer every theological, philosophical, or spiritual question. Such a feat would be impossible. But it does give us what we need for the accomplishing of the purpose of God. John 20:30,31 – *Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

*I believe in God like I believe in the sun, not because I can see it, but because of it all things are seen.*⁸² C. S. Lewis -

⁸²Simpson, James B., comp. *Simpson's Contemporary Quotations*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988. www.bartleby.com/63/. – also quoted in *The Question of God, C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life* – Dr. Armand M. Nicholi, Jr. - Free Press – 2002.

TWO STORIES

Knowing the Book involves knowing the Author

There was once a young woman who was a student at university. She had a particular course that she found very difficult. On top of this, she considered the major textbook for the course to be dry and boring. At a point where she had slogged her way through half of the course, she was invited to a cocktail party. At the party she met a young man. She found him friendly and conversant, and lo and behold, he was the author of the textbook for the course she was taking. After a delightful evening, the young woman went home and began reading her textbook with an interest and enthusiasm that she had never known before. Having met the author, the book came alive.

The Bible

Preparing for a long trip, a traveler said to his friend: "I am just about packed. I only have to put in a guidebook, a lamp, a mirror, a microscope, a telescope, a volume of fine poetry, a few biographies, a package of old letters, a book of songs, a sword, a hammer and a set of books I have been studying."

"But," the friend replied, "you can't get all that into your bag."

"Oh, yes," replied the traveler, "it doesn't take much room." He placed his Bible in the corner of the suitcase and closed the lid.

From *Bruce & Stan's Guide to the Bible*

LOOKING TOWARD BEV-#2

The logo for Bird's Eye View is an owl. Owls are considered very wise, and they have a unique perspective given their ability to turn their heads nearly 360 degrees. Owls do not say, "What?" or "How?" or "When?" or "Why?" or "Where?". They say, "Who?"

The Bible raises a number of "Who?" questions, like "Who is God?" and "Who are we in relation to God?" and "Who is Jesus Christ and how does he figure into the Story?"

In our next session, we will ask a number of "Who" questions and discover more about the Story and the theme of the Bible. We will also unfold a comprehensive overview, in one diagram, of the Bible and its message.

Resources:

The Question of God, Armand M. Nicolli, Free Press – 2002

Description: Based on a course that Nicholi has taught at the Harvard Medical School for over 30 years, this depicts an all-out battle for the soul by two of the 20th century's intellectual giants, who debate such overriding issues as God, love, sex, and the meaning of life from nearly the ends of the spectrum. 304 pages, softcover.

The Canon of Scripture, F. F. Bruce, IVP - 1988

Description: After nearly nineteen centuries, the content of the canon is still debated by Christians and scholars. Who decided what the canon should include? What criteria were used? In this significant study, F.F. Bruce brings the wisdom of a lifetime to bear in answering questions and clearing away confusion about the Christian canon. 350 pages, hardcover.

From God to Us, Norman Geisler, Moody Bible Institute - 1974

Description: In *From God to Us*, you will learn basic facts about the origin of the Bible. These facts are explained in a simple, clear style. This book also includes a discussion on the nature of inspiration, textual criticism, and various translations. About the Authors. Norman L. Geisler is a professor of systematic theology at Dallas Theological Seminary. William E. Nix is an editorial and educational consultant based in Dallas, Texas. He and Dr. Geisler have also authored the book *A General Introduction to the Bible*. 255 pages. Paperback.

How We Got Our Bible, Bill Donahue, IVP - 2000 – study guide

Description: How did the Bible come into existence? Why and how were these books chosen? How do we know that the Bible we hold today is reliable? This guide gives you the foundational information you need to read the Bible as a trustworthy source for your life. This series is designed to ground a Christ follower in the study and understanding of Scripture. Be prepared for some challenge and some stretching.

Bruce & Stan's GUIDE TO THE BIBLE, A User-Friendly Approach, Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz, Harvest House, 1998.

Review - Bruce and Stan keep things rolling along with their lighthearted approach to Bible study. Their book is compact - easy to hold and read or throw into a backpack without it weighing a ton. It really has a way of bringing the important points together in as short a way as possible (includes the entire Bible in an overview to be read in under 25 minutes). Also includes a handy list of concordances like where to find info on "friendship" or "disappointment" within the Bible. Reviewed by "Hello Kitty Ellen" (Virginia Beach, VA) – from www.amazon.com

www.christianitytoday.com

www.answering-islam.org

www.tektonics.org

www.christian-thinktank.com



NOTES



BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE BIBLE - 2

THE BIBLE - ITS STORY AND THEME

The object of this lesson is to discover the story that the Bible is – to see its theme and to see how that theme is woven throughout the First and Second Testaments. (more often called the Old and New Testaments).

I. THE STORY OF THE BIBLE

The Bible has been described as a story or a myth. But this does not mean that it is simply “made up” or that it is a human attempt to explain the inexplicable. Unlike legends, which have some connection with actual events, or myth, the story of the Bible is rooted in time and space – in history. It is a true story or as C. S. Lewis has called it, “a true myth”.⁸³

The story of the Bible finds its origins in a Divine Experiment. God, whose existence and nature is to love, works to create the perfect place in which to cultivate a relationship of love with human beings. The universe, the world, nature in all its immensity and complexity, is the laboratory where the experiment unfolds.

The Bible tells us of the beginnings of the experiment – of the parameters which surrounded the experiment – and how it went tragically awry. The amazing thing is that God did not pack up the lab and go home. Even after the experiment unraveled, God continued to reach out in love. The Bible is the story of how this has occurred and continues to do so.

The Bible tells us that we are part of something larger than ourselves. We are part of a Story that started before we were born and will continue after we die. The Story is epic in its

⁸³ Dr. Armand M. Nicholi, Jr. – *The Question of God, C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life* – Free Press – 2002. – p. 87.

proportion, but at the same time, we know, in our heart of hearts, that what the Story says is true when it tells us that all is not well. Something is wrong in the Story, terribly wrong. We can see it in history. We can see it in the world around us. When we are honest, we can see it in our own hearts.

The Bible begins with the “Who-ness” of God. Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning, God...” The Bible seems to enjoy raising the “who” questions and it answers them in some surprising ways - ways that we, as humans, would never have thought of - ways that are often difficult to comprehend and as such are the subject of much, ongoing debate. One of those questions revolves around the “Who-ness” of God.

II. THREE “WHO” QUESTIONS

“WHO” QUESTION #1 - WHO IS GOD?

GOD – SINGULAR AND PLURAL AT THE SAME TIME

The Bible makes an apparent contradiction in terms when it describes God in a singular manner and as a plurality at the same time.

Deuteronomy 6:4 is a pivotal text for any and all who view the First Testament as Scriptural. It clearly states that the Lord, our God, the Lord is one! And yet it uses a plural ending on the name of God. How can God be one and plural at the same time?

In Genesis 1:26,27, God says, “Let us create humankind in our image.” Plurality once again - possibly.

This brings us to the Trinity. Granted, the word Trinity is not found in the Bible, but the word does suffice to describe the plurality of Persons that exist as a function of the Being of God. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit - all and each possess the fullness of the deity of God. Can we explain it logically, in human terms? - Not likely. It is another instance of an affirmation made in the Bible which it makes no effort to explain to our satisfaction. This actually adds to the credibility of the doctrine of the Trinity in that it not only defies human logic, but also that it's not the product of human thought.

WHY THE TRINITY?

The Trinity is significant in that it reveals God in community - in relationship. In 1 John 4, the Bible tells us that God is love. Love is not simply something God does. It's God's nature. The love relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit existed before time began, before we were born, and it will continue to eternity.

Illustrations of the TRINITY

- Music**
- God the Composer (the Father)
 - God the Musical Score (the Son)
 - God the music played (the Spirit)

- H₂O**
- below 0 degrees C – ice
 - above 0 degrees C – water
 - above 100 degrees C – steam vapor

Mathematics

$$1 + 1 + 1 = 3 \quad \text{but} \quad 1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$$

A person

- is comprised of the id, the ego, and the super-ego – all a part of the one person
- can be a parent, a sibling, and a spouse all at the same time

Sir Francis Fox wrote his autobiography *Sixty-Three Years of Engineering* in 1924. His treatment of the compound nature of white light is a typical example. The fact that a prism divides a ray of light from the sun into three primary colors is used to show "not only the possibility but the existence of One in Three and Three in One, the most perfect illustration in nature of the doctrine of the Trinity." Drawing out the analogy further, Fox notes that "violet is the chemical and actinic ray; *yellow* is the lighting ray; red is the heating ray; and these correspond more or less closely to the functions of the three Persons of the Trinity."

"WHO" QUESTION #2 - WHO ARE WE?

HUMANKIND - MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD - Key verses: Genesis 1:26,27

To say that mankind is made in the image of God is not to say that we are little gods.

It does mean that we are created in God's likeness. This is what sets us apart from all other earthly creatures.

We were created in the image of God in a number of ways:

Intellect - Only human beings have this capacity of mind. We alone have a concept of God.

Sensibility - Mankind has the complex emotions of love, hate, anger, compassion, joy, etc.

Creativity - like God, we have the ability to create. The Bible tells us that God creates *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, and we can't do that. But as human beings, we use what already exists to bring something new into existence - from the invention of the airplane to the writing of a computer program or from composing a musical score to building a better mousetrap.

Will - When God fashioned mankind, He did not want a robot or an automaton. He gave us a will which could be exercised in one of two ways - in obedience to the will

of God or in rebellion against God with the exercise of self-will.

Self-consciousness - humans are unique in all creation in that we are aware of our own existence and being - in relation to our “selves”, in relation to other people, and in relation to the world around us.

God-consciousness - as human beings, created in God’s image, we have an intrinsic knowledge of God’s existence. Some would tell us that we are “hard-wired” to be religious. We are spiritual beings by very nature.

Not only is the reality of God evidenced in creation (Psalm 19:1, Romans 1:21), but as human beings, we have a deep intuitive sense of God’s existence and presence, not only in the universe and in the world, but also in relationship to us. (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Is this by accident? If so, then why has it shown itself throughout the course of human history? And why do we have a personal, inner-longing for that which only God can satisfy? Could it be that it is a part of “Who” we are?

St. Augustine wrote, *“We find no rest until we find our rest in Thee.”*

Blaise Pascal (French mathematician, philosopher, physicist) wrote, *“There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus.”*

“WHO” QUESTION #3 - WHO ARE WE IN RELATION TO GOD?

The Bible addresses this question by telling us that God has created us in love, by love, and for love. God has effectively opened the fellowship of the Trinity to embrace humankind. This is the opening Act of our part of the play on the stage of Time. The universe, the world, all of creation - was created as the perfect environment in which to cultivate this love relationship.

HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN? - or “Don’t You Want Somebody to Love?”

In order for God to extend and expand the parameters of love beyond that of the Trinity, a creature capable of love had to be created. Enter humankind...

God did everything in His power to create the perfect environment for the perfect relationship.

He created the universe - no small task...

He created the world - unspoiled and teeming with life...

He created human beings - made in His image...

He was present with them - lavishing His love on them...

II. THE EXPERIMENT UNFOLDS – THE DRAMA PLAYS OUT

A. THE DIVINE EXPERIMENT – Creating the perfect place for the perfect relationship

B. THE NEED FOR A CHOICE

In order for mankind's will to have value, the right choice had to exist.

Every inducement to live in harmony with the will of God was made in the Garden of Eden, but an opportunity to choose existed.

God said, "There is one tree I do not want you to eat of." (Genesis 2:17). The tree was God's instrument of choice.

C. OPPOSITION TO GOD'S REVEALED WILL IS SIN

God told mankind that if they exercised their will in disobedience to His will, they would then be guilty of sin and under the penalty of death.

D. THE CHOICE WAS MADE

Mankind exercised free will in disobedience to God, sinned, and therefore became subject to death. (Genesis 3:1-15).

Death, in biblical terms, always means separation. There are different types of death mentioned in the Bible, yet each one involves a kind of separation.

The disobedience that took place in the Garden of Eden resulted in death. Genesis 3:8-12 reveals three types of separation:

separation from God (Adam and Eve hid from Him when He sought them)

separation from self (Adam and Eve each realized that they were naked and in need of a covering).

separation from others (evident when Adam seeks to lay the blame on the woman that God gave him.)

The Bible tells us that the entire human race has been affected by the reality of sin and separation. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23).

The apostle Paul tells us that all of creation has been negatively affected by the Fall.

(Romans 8:19-22)

E. GOD EXPLAINS THE PLAN

The Bible was written to explain God's wonderful plan for mankind, enabling us to once again know God and have fellowship with Him. (God did not end the experiment, pack up the lab, & go home)

III. THE THEME UNFOLDED IN THE FIRST TESTAMENT

The theme of Scripture is the redemption of mankind. The Scriptures tell us how **God buys mankind back**. Sin caused mankind to be doomed to death, but in His mercy, God arranged a way for justice to be fully satisfied - a way for mankind to return to Him in complete fellowship.

A. MANKIND DIED SPIRITUALLY

The moment that mankind sinned, they died spiritually and the penalty of death was upon them. At that moment, God stepped in and declared His intention to buy mankind back, to pay the price of freedom. This is declared in the prophetic verse of Genesis 3:15.

B. THE PROMISED ONE COMING

This One promised would come into the world at the right moment in God's time (Galatians 4:4). The First Testament is the account of how God prepared a people and nurtured a lineage for this One who would redeem mankind.

The lineage begins with Seth (Genesis 4:25,26).

It continues with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3).

Isaac, Abraham's son, is in the lineage (Genesis 17:19).

God selected Jacob to continue the line (Genesis 32:24-28).

5. Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel, had twelve sons, who fathered the twelve tribes of Israel through whom the Redeemer was to come. The specific tribe from which He would come was Judah (Genesis 49:10).

Most of the First Testament is concerned with the nation of Israel. It tells how God delivered the Israelites from bondage, how He gave them the Law and the sacrificial system, and provided atonement for sins. (This system typified the Lamb of God who one day would be sacrificed for all - John 1:29).

C. DIVISIONS OF THE FIRST TESTAMENT

History - of the world and mankind, but especially of the nation of Israel. It includes the books of Genesis through Esther.

Poetry - mostly written by the people of Israel. It includes the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and portions of Isaiah.

Prophecy - concerning the future of Israel and the Gentile nation. These books have historical settings and include Isaiah through Malachi except Lamentations.

IV. THE THEME REVEALED IN THE SECOND TESTAMENT

A. THE GOSPELS

The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels ('gospel' means "Good News"). They are eyewitness accounts of four men who observed the One who came to pay the price to buy mankind back. They see Christ from four different viewpoints. (Harry Truman – 4 versions of truth)

Matthew sees Jesus as King.

Mark presents Christ as Servant.

Luke presents Christ as Man.

John presents Christ as God.

B. HISTORY

The Book of Acts is a history of the work and faith of the early Christians after the ascension of Christ.

C. LETTERS

From Romans to Jude, these letters were written to individuals and churches in order to instruct Christians in how the redeemed are to live.

D. PROPHECY

The book of Revelation foretells where the redeemed ones will live forever. It also foretells the doom of those who reject the Redeemer.

V. THE THEME IN THE FIRST REALIZED IN THE SECOND

– I will be your God, if you will be my people –

The prophecies in the Old (First) Testament concerning the Person who would come as the Redeemer were fulfilled in the New (Second) Testament.

FIRST TESTAMENT / SECOND TESTAMENT

A. He would come from the nation of Israel – Genesis 12:3; Numbers 24:17,19; Matthew 2:6

B. He would come from the tribe of Judah – Genesis 49:10; Micah 5:2; Luke 1:31-33

C. He would come from the family of David – Isaiah 11:1,10; Luke 1:31-33

D. He would be born in Bethlehem – Micah 5:2; Luke 2:4,6,7

- E. He would be born of a virgin – Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18,22,23
- F. He would suffer and make atonement – Isaiah 53:4-6; 2 Corinthians 5:21
- G. He would be crucified – Psalm 22; Matthew 27
- H. He would be resurrected from the dead – Psalm 16:9-10; Acts 2:31

A STORY

There was once a young boy named Mike who built a beautiful sailboat. Now this was no ordinary sailboat. It was actually able to sail. Mike built his sailboat by hand. He fashioned the hull out of a single piece of wood. He handcrafted the mast, ran every line for the sails, and painted his boat, right down to the finest detail. It was magnificent!

Mike spent hours sailing his boat along the edge of the lake. He fine-tuned the rigging and worked to perfect his sailing skill. He found great joy in his sailboat.

But then there was a day, as Mike sailed his boat, when the wind shifted unexpectedly and Mike's boat sailed out into the middle of the lake and beyond toward the other side. There was nothing Mike could do to retrieve his boat. All he could do was watch it disappear. He was very sad.

It just so happened that Mike walked past a Toy Shop on his way to and from school each day. The Toy Shop had a large display window that looked out on to the sidewalk. Mike would often glance through the window as he walked by. On one particular day, he looked in the window and continued to walk toward home. Then - he stopped in his tracks and virtually flew back to the store window. There in the window was his sailboat. He knew it was his. He had fashioned the hull, run every line, painted every detail - himself! He ran into the store and asked the shopkeeper how much the sailboat cost. "It's a very fine sailboat," the shopkeeper said, "And so the price is rather high." Mike listened, but the price didn't matter to him. He was off like a shot.

For the next several weeks, Mike devoted himself to earning money. He mowed grass. He delivered newspapers. He even did dishes... And - he saved every dime he earned. He didn't spend any of what he earned.

And then the day came - when he had earned enough to pay for the sailboat. After school, he raced home to get his money and then on to the Toy Shop. Mike emptied his bag of dollars, quarters, dimes, nickels, and pennies on the counter, and the shopkeeper counted it all out. There was exactly enough.

Then, the shopkeeper reached over the curtain to retrieve the sailboat from the shop window. He turned and placed the boat in Mike's waiting arms. Mike embraced his sailboat, and with a far-away look in his eye, said, "I made you. Now, I've bought you. You're twice mine..."

And so it is with God. He made us, and now we have been bought with a price. The Bible tells us that, in Jesus Christ, God has bought us back.

There are only two kinds of people in the end: those that say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.' C. S. Lewis

LOOKING AHEAD TO BEV-#3 - The 4th "Who" question... WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

The Bible tells us that where the first Adam brought separation with God, self, and others – the second Adam bridged the gap between God, self, and others (see the Great Commandment – Matthew 22 and Romans) and “bought us back”.

Just as this is the central theme, Christ is the central character, because He is The One who paid the price (death) to buy us back.

Next time, we will study the Person of Christ who fulfilled the purpose of God.

Resources:

A Newcomer's Guide to the Bible: Themes and Time Lines, Michael C. Armour, College Press Publishing Co. – July 1999

Description: Michael Armour wants to help you see the "hidden" pictures within the Bible. He wants you to see that it is more than a dry book of moral guidelines. Look how the family tree of Jesus jumps from the pages of the Old Testament. Examine how some of his family lived only for the moment, while others lived by faith. The New Testament begins by telling the life story of Jesus while he was on this earth, followed by the resulting change for those who believed in Jesus as a personal Savior.

Cover to Cover – Getting the Bible's Big Picture, Judson Poling, IVP – 2000 – study guide

Description: What do we have to gain from those long Old Testament sections on the law? What about all that history? What can we learn from Paul's letters to the church in the New Testament? By introducing each of the major sections of Scripture, this guide helps us gain perspective on the whole message of God's Word. Six Sessions for small groups to include: The Law & History and Poetry The Prophets and Revelation The Gospels Acts and the Epistles Putting it All Together, and Leader's Notes. The purpose is designed to ground a Christ follower in the study and understanding of Scripture. It is foundational but not easy or light - be prepared for some challenging and some stretching. Approximate meeting time is 75 to 90 minutes including prayer time. Charts, maps, questions, teamwork are found within 63 pages of Study.

NOOMA® Trees, DVD 003

Rob Bell

We want to know why we are here. If our lives really matter. How our religion is relevant to this life. Today. We want to understand what significance this minute, hour, week, month, and year has to our lives. To our world. We need a God who cares about this life, in this world, right now. We want to understand why everything we think, everything we say, and everything we do matters. We don't want to just sit back and wait for something to happen or someday to come. We want to know if all the choices we make now will shape our world and lives for eternity. Because we want our lives to have meaning today, and our lives today to have meaning forever. 13 minutes.



NOTES

THE BIBLE

IN ONE DIAGRAM

Two different approaches
with explanations of each

THE BIBLE IN ONE DIAGRAM – TWO DIFFERENT APPROACHS

The Bible in One Diagram effectively conveys the overall meaning and message of the Bible. Each of the two diagrams seeks to accomplish this in a different way.

DIAGRAM #1 – The Three Trees Diagram

This diagram works to layout the meaning and message of the Bible in a comprehensive manner. Each segment of the diagram paints the Big Picture of the Bible in sweeping, large strokes.

In explaining the diagram, the first tack is to speak in terms of how the Bible can be described in terms of trees – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of the Cross, and the tree of eternal life.

The first tree is an instrument of choice. God created it and placed it in the Garden as a necessary test. It was a test of love. It was necessary because love cannot be manufactured, mandated, or coerced. It must be received and in turn given freely. Depending on how humankind dealt with the test would determine what occurred next. It is important to stress that God did not set up Adam and Eve to fail, but from the beginning, had only good intention and their best interest (always) at heart.

Having failed the test, the result was the Fall. History, at that point, began to unfold on a lower level than it had in the Garden. God's good intention was not realized and humanity did not enter into the fullness of relationship that God desired. The important point to be made at this juncture is that God did not give up on humanity. God did not pack up the lab and go home. God continued (and continues) to take the initiative and reach out to humankind in love. God's love is conveyed

throughout the Scriptures in the form of a covenantal formula: “I will be your God if you will be my people.” – by which God declares his intent not to abandon humanity and the love relationship for which every person is created. Even so, the promise carries with it, of necessity, a choice.

The second tree, the Cross, is the instrument of choice. Rather than abandon humanity, God sent One who would make provision for sin. It is through faith in Christ that a person says “Yes” or “No” to the love initiative of God and in so doing enter into the promise of God. The covenantal formula is expressed throughout the Bible and it finds its fulfillment in the new creation, when what God intended from the beginning is realized in the new heaven and the new earth at which time those who have accepted God’s gift of grace will partake of the fruit of the tree of eternal life. The partaking of the fruit of the tree of eternal life must be viewed as being accomplished in its proper time – God’s time. In the test laid out in Genesis, the reason the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was prohibited was because God knew the danger of eating of it, namely, that it would open the way for humanity to have access to the tree of eternal life not only prematurely, but in a way that was not appropriate or effective.

The third element at work in Diagram #1 is how God, in the process of our entering into His covenantal promise, works to transform the human heart. This progression is laid out on page 3 of this diagram. This works to show that God is not interested in outward conformity or mere adherence to rules and regulations. As a function of God’s transcendence, He seeks to communicate that transcendence to us in the form of a transformed heart. This has personal implications, certainly, as each individual is engaged and involved in cultivating his/her faith walk with God, but it

also has corporate implications in the realization that the Church is made up of the “company and the community of the transformed heart” – which is the more specific subject of BEV #4.

DIAGRAM #2 – The Linear Diagram

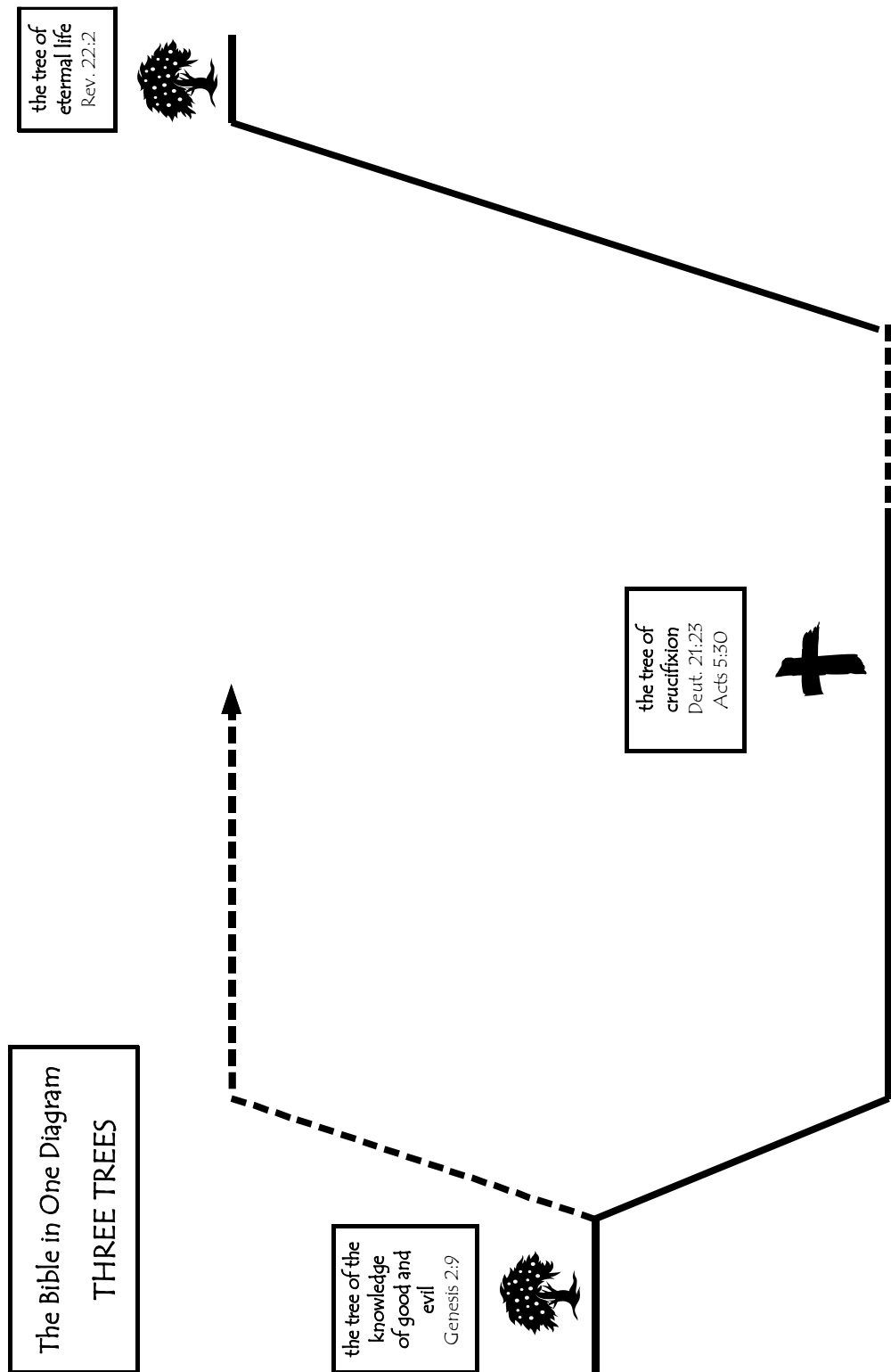
The second diagram came at the suggestion of one of the couples with who “field tested” BEV. They enjoyed Diagram #1 very much, but wanted more. They wanted the material laid out in a way that unfolded in a manner that corresponded with the unfolding of the BEV material. And so, rather than using broad brush strokes, Diagram #2 unfolds in a linear fashion and includes a different focus from Diagram #1, which, at the same time, works to enlarge and complement the earlier material. The approach Diagram #2 is very simple – discussing the Scriptures and explaining each segment of the “flip chart” presentation. The primary aim throughout is to be responsive to the areas of interest and the questions of the people to whom the material is being presented. The diagram is a framework that is designed to give a comprehensive overview that will be specifically meaningful for the students being exposed to the information.

Continuity between Diagram #1 and Diagram #2 is achieved by using the “three trees” framework in both. By looking at the Bible from two different angles, the hope is that they will work together to provide BEV students with a clearer picture of what the Bible says.

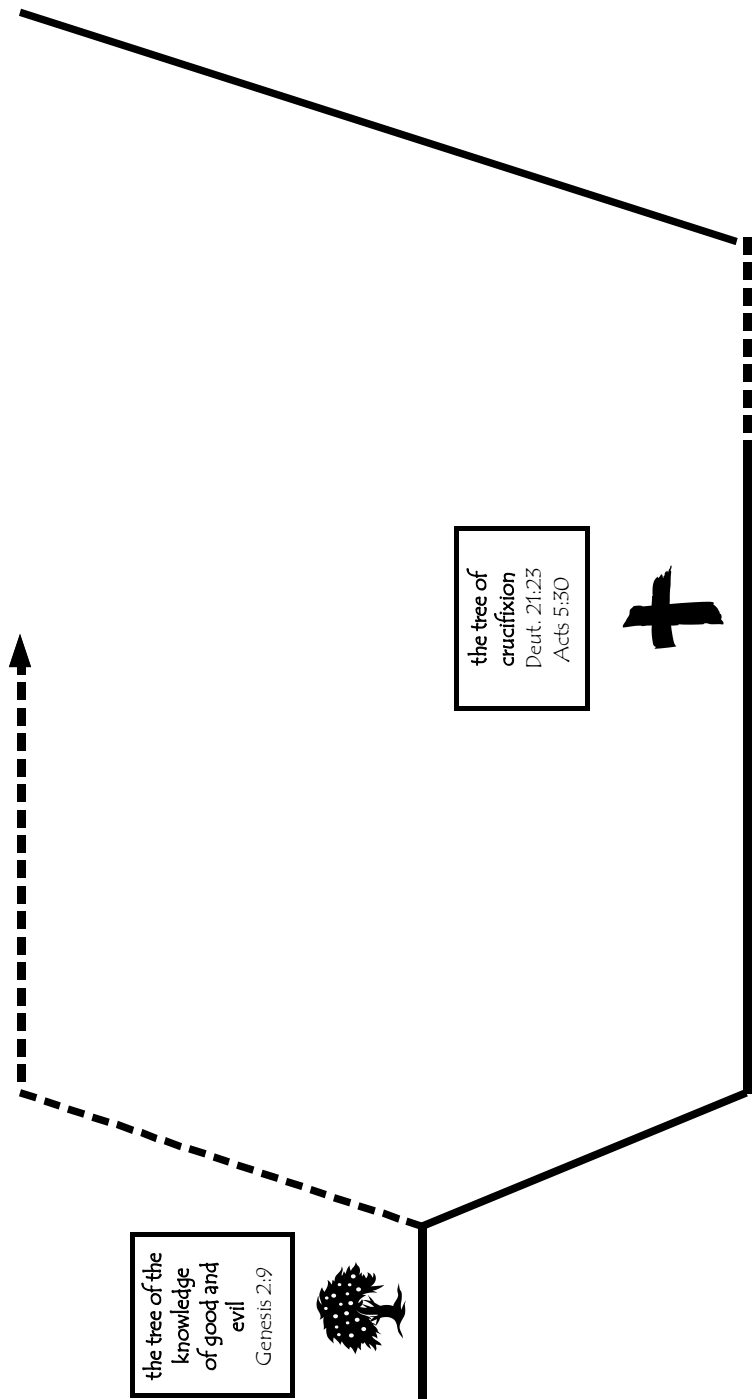
Participants in BEV have found that this panoramic view of the Bible really turns the lights on for them. It provides an overall comprehension of the message of Scripture and serves as a prelude to BEV #3 which highlights the central place and

important of Jesus Christ. In this regard, it is possible to present the material in Diagram #2 in two stages. Stage #1, which would come at the end of BEV #2, could extend to the Cross (“God keeps His Word and sends the Promised One”), and Stage #2 could follow BEV #3 where the Person and work of Christ is featured.

DIAGRAM #1 - THREE TREES DIAGRAM



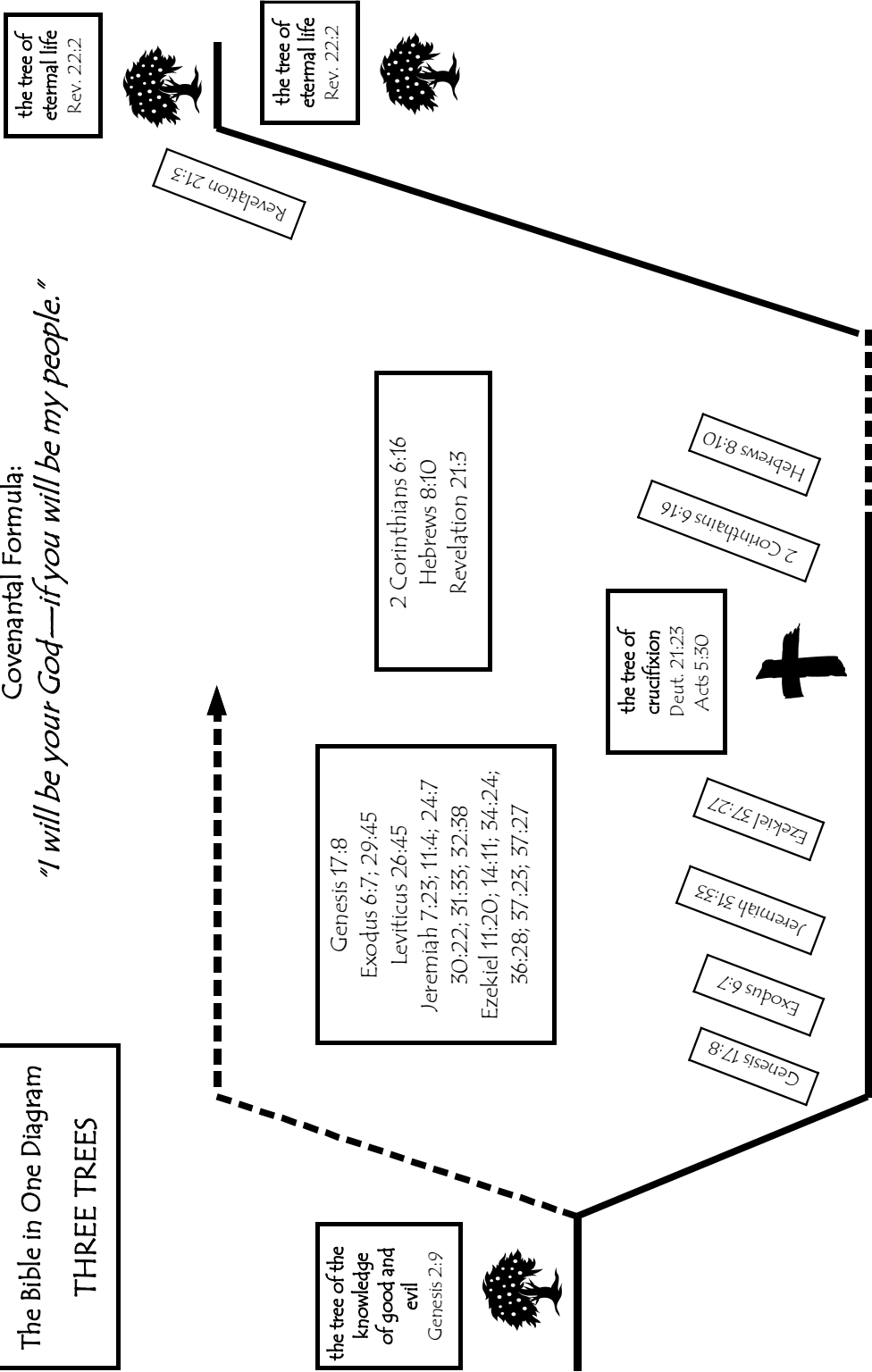
The Bible in One Diagram
THREE TREES



The Bible in One Diagram

THREE TREES

Covenantal Formula:
"I will be your God—if you will be my people."



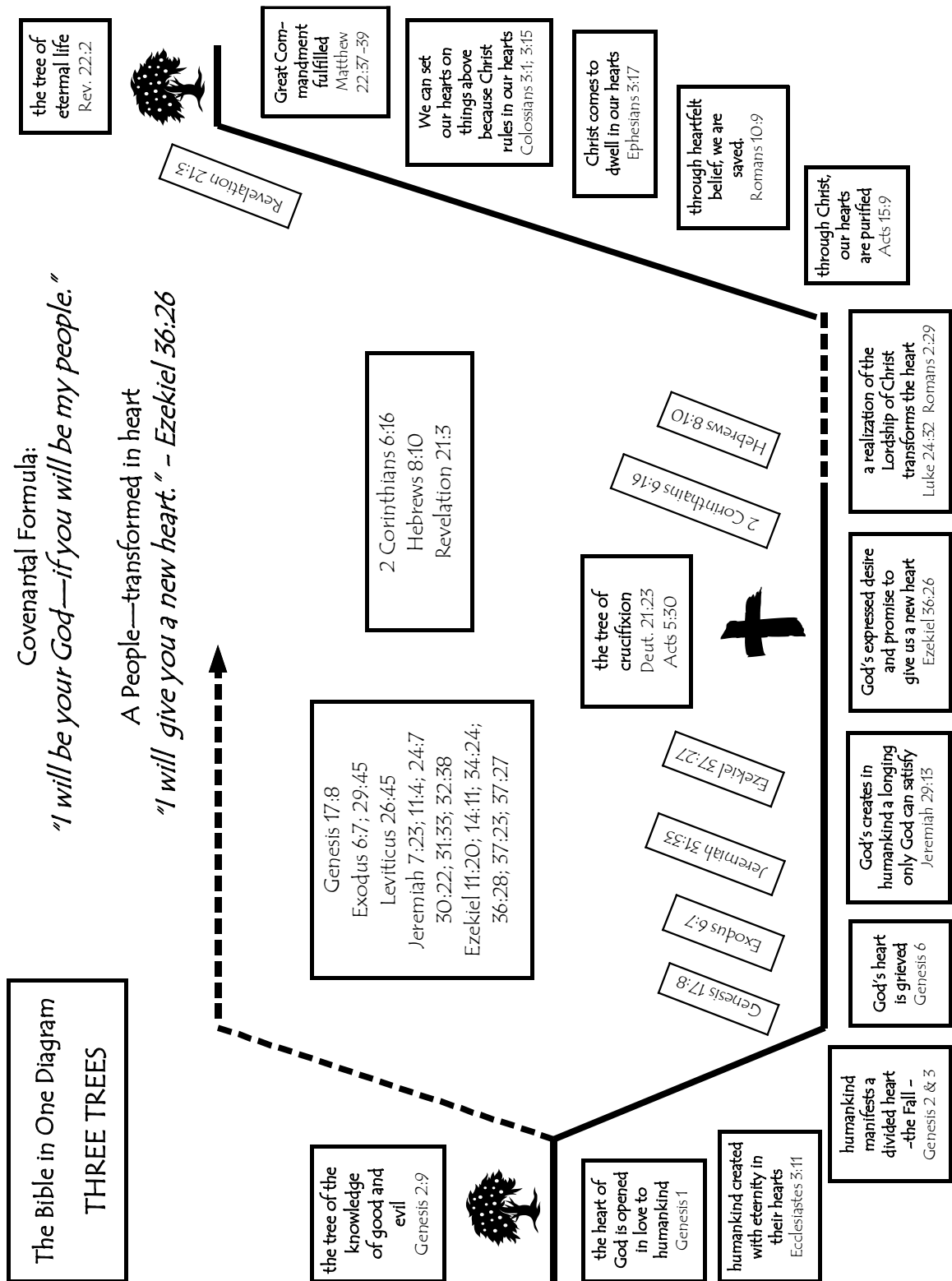
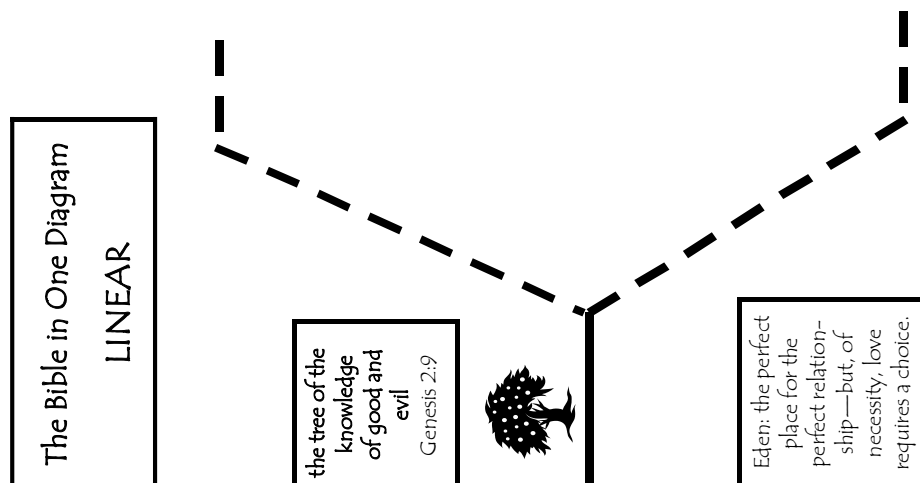
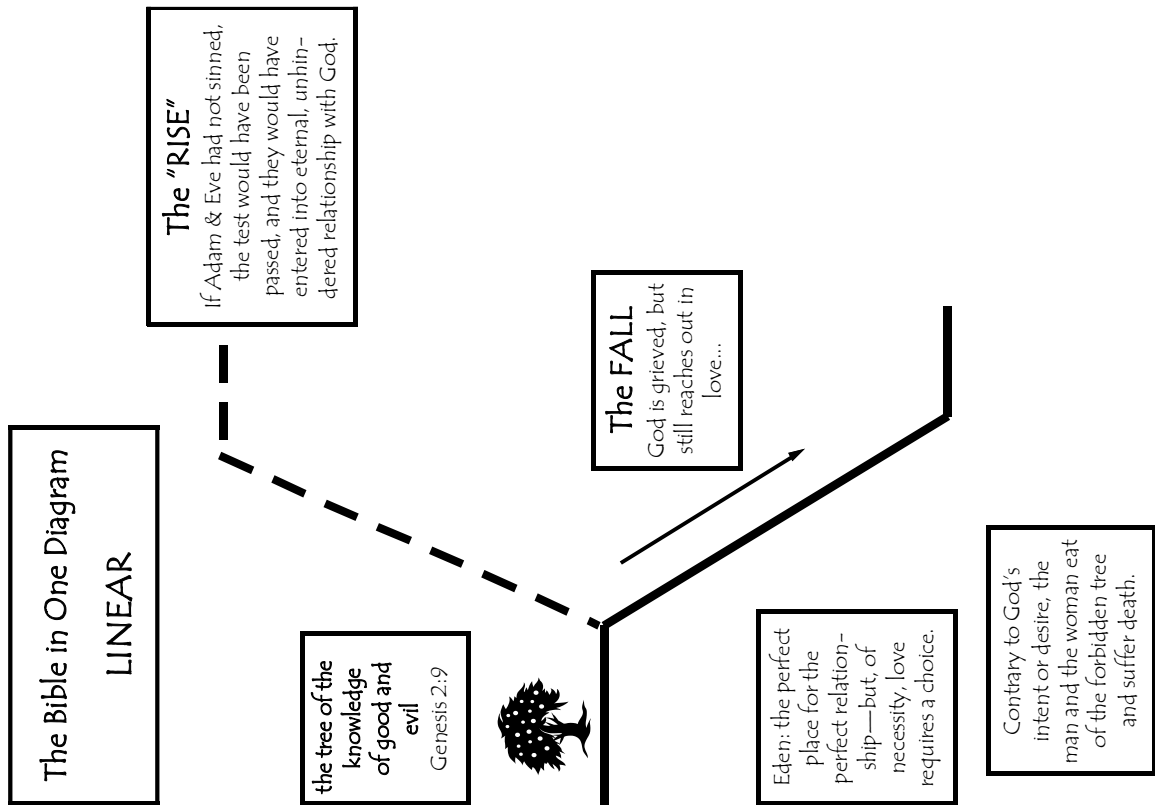
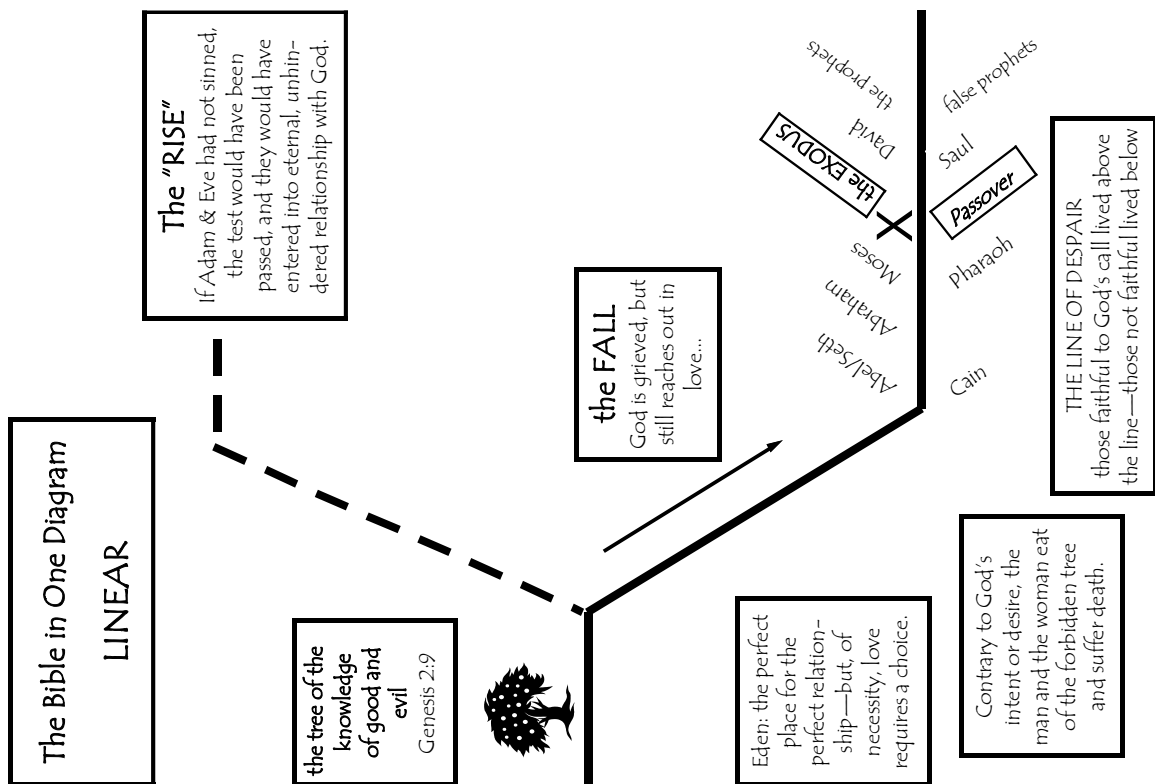
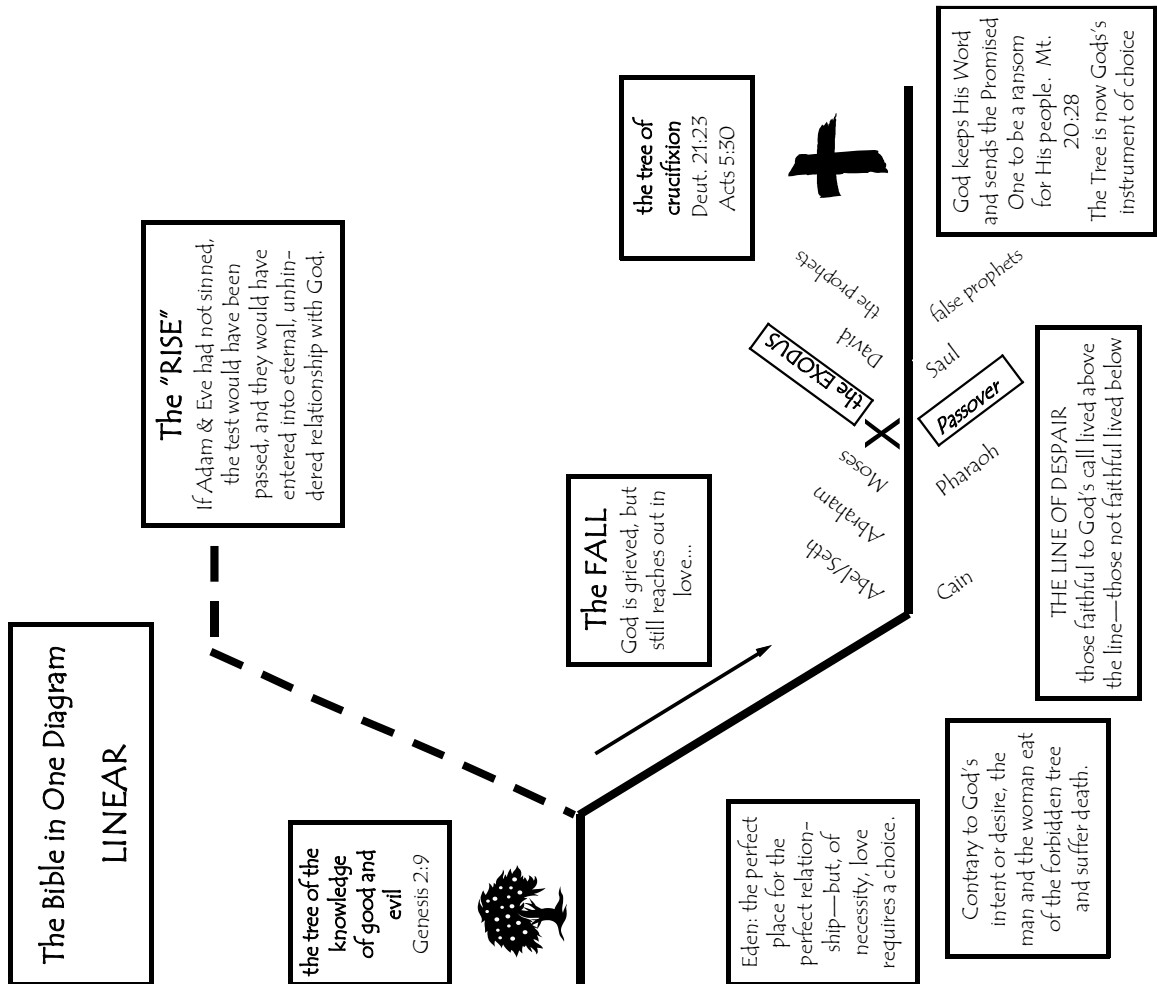


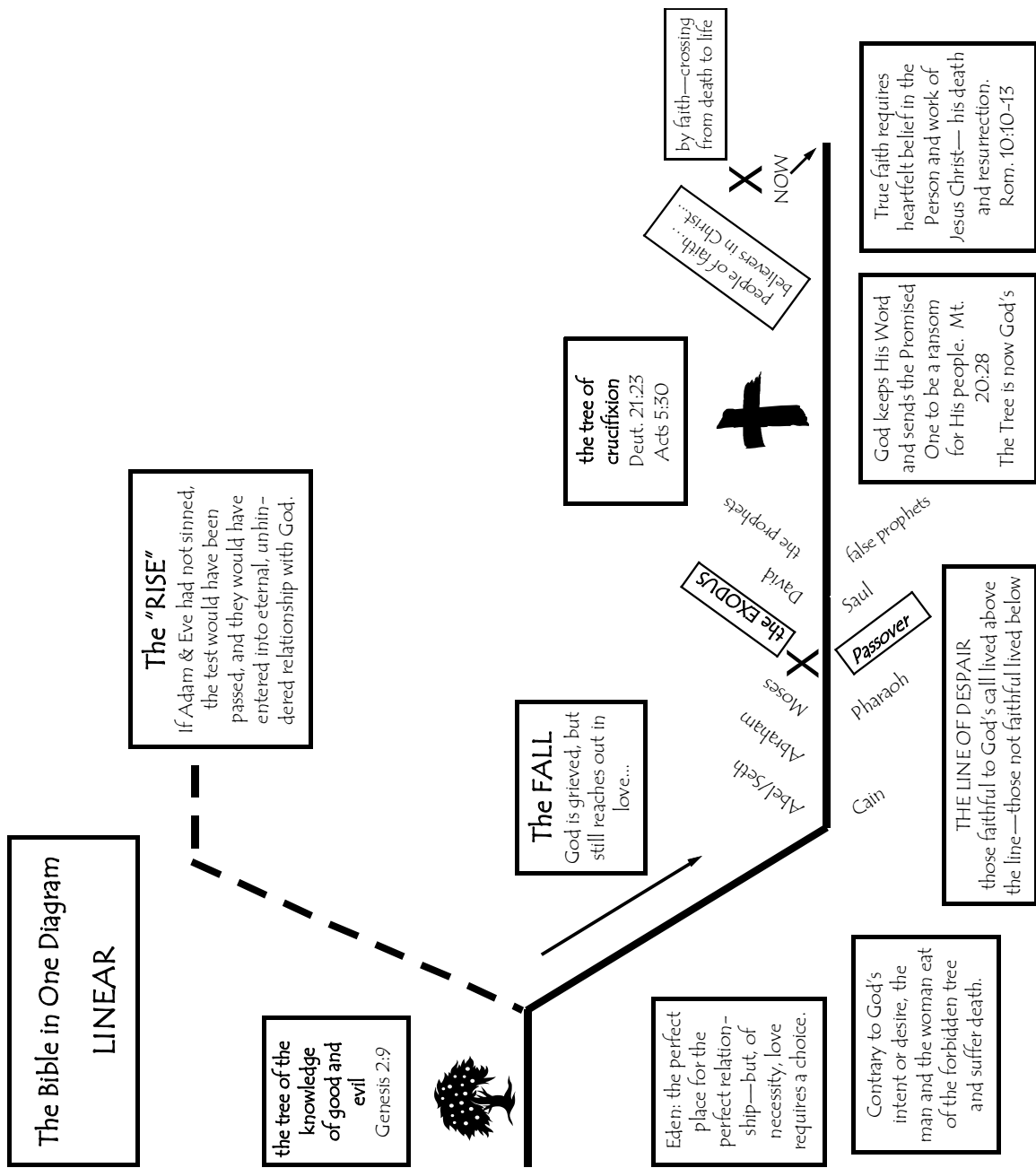
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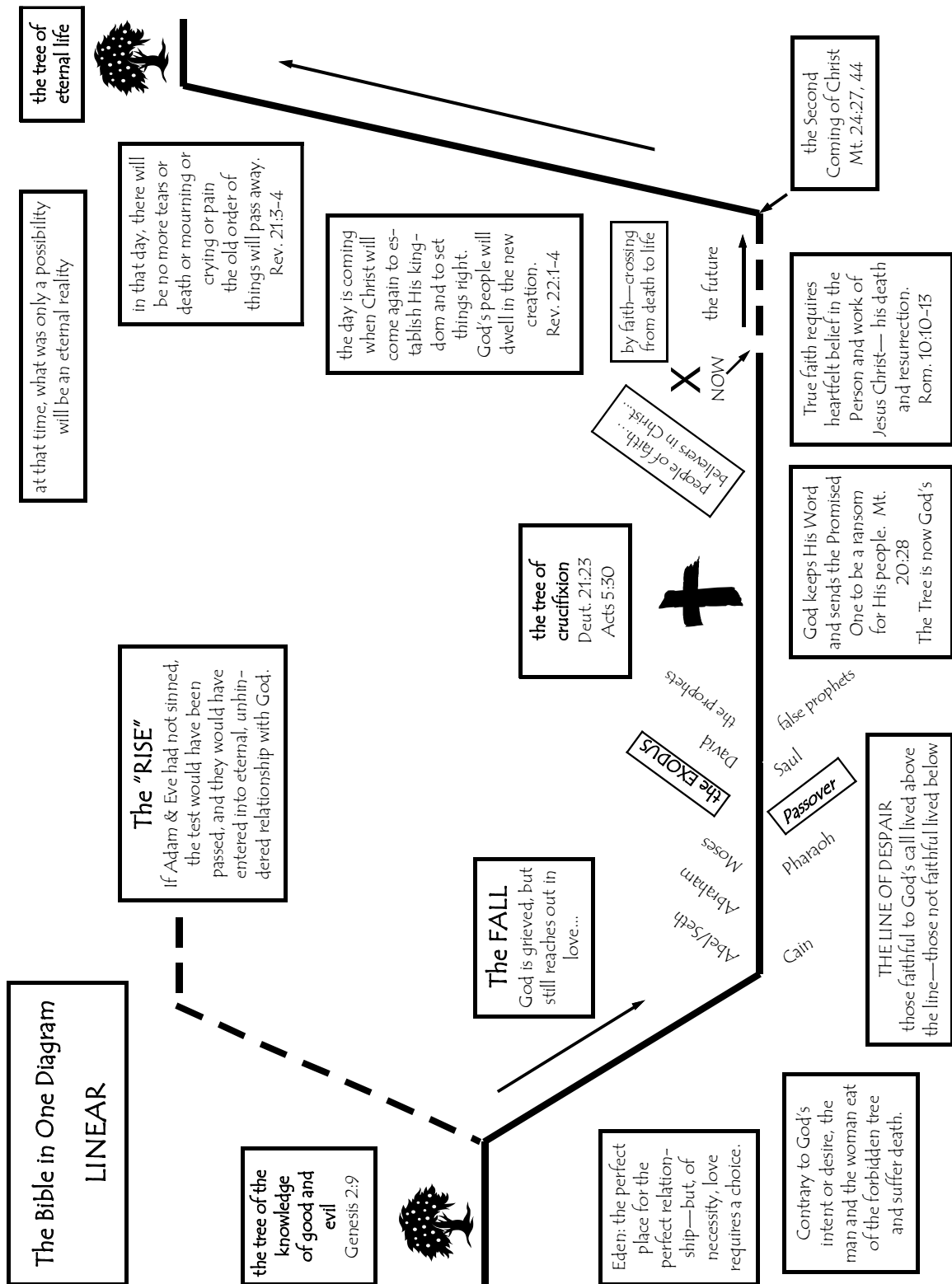














BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE BIBLE - 3

THE BIBLE - ITS PERSON AND WORK

INTRODUCTION -

I wish I had a dollar for every time someone has said to me, "I'm spiritual, but not religious." As frustrating as it is to hear this kind of a statement, there is a reason for it. When people think of Christianity, they think of the Church. When they think of the Church, they look back at a history that is less than stellar. Someone once said that Christianity would be fine if it wasn't for Christians. Although people's eyes glaze over when talking about the Church, there is a growing interest in the Person of Jesus Christ. Almost universally, people find him to be intriguing.

It is vital that a serious consideration of Christian faith be centered in understanding the Person of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 16, Jesus asks his disciples, "*Who do others say that I am?*" They give a variety of answers to the question. But then Jesus goes on to ask, "*But who do you say that I am?*" This is the operative question for us today. The most important thing we can do, when considering the Bible, is to have the courage to ask that question and to endeavor to answer it for ourselves.

So, let's move from the story and theme of the Bible to look at the Person and work of Christ.

We have learned the theme of the Bible is the redemption of mankind, "***buying mankind back.***"

Like our first parents, Adam and Eve, we are implicitly and explicitly, inadvertently and overtly separated from God. The result, death, is categorically contrary to the nature purpose of God, which is life. Romans 6:23 says that every person is under a kind of death sentence, and the penalty must be paid.

The gospel, or "Good News" is that God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, paid the price. In dying, He took the penalty upon Himself in order that we might have life for time and eternity.

Let's proceed to study about Jesus Christ, the One who paid the price for atonement (at-one-ment).

I. THE ETERNAL EXISTENCE OF CHRIST

A. HIS ETERNAL PRE-EXISTENCE

The Bible teaches the birth of Christ was not His beginning (John 1:1-3).

He was before John the Baptist

John the Baptist said Christ had always existed. John 1:15). Jesus was born six months after John, yet John said, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." He was stating that God the Son had existence in eternity.

B. CHRIST TAUGHT HIS ETERNAL EXISTENCE

John 8:58

John 17:5

John 6:61,62

C. THE APOSTLES TAUGHT HIS ETERNAL EXISTENCE

John 1:1-3

Colossians 1:17

Hebrews 1:1-3

II. CHRIST CAME TO EARTH

A. HIS BIRTH PROPHESED

Isaiah spoke of His birth 700 years before, saying that He would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).

B. DETAILS OF HIS BIRTH

Matthew 1:18-20 – Mary

She was a virgin.

She was espoused to Joseph.

Jewish weddings had two stages, separated by an espousal period.

She was with child after her espousal to Joseph and before their marriage was consummated.

Joseph assumed she had been unfaithful to him, and planned to divorce her quietly.

III. CHRIST BECAME A MAN

A. THE BEGINNING OF HIS HUMAN EXISTENCE

Christ was always a Person (possessing intellect, emotion, and will), but not always a man. His birth was the beginning of His human existence (Philippians 2:5-8).

John 1:14 – The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

He became like us – so that we could become like him.

B. HIS HUMAN EXISTENCE AND THE VIRGIN BIRTH

The doctrine of the virgin conception is important.

By normal procreative process, a new personality is formed. Christ was a personality before His birth. Had He received a second personality through conception, He would have been two persons living in one body.

The virgin birth (conception) protects our Lord from a blasphemous alternative. Since Joseph disclaims any procreative responsibility for the baby, whose child was He?

The virgin birth gave Christ a human body and human existence without the weakness of human nature. He had no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He did not inherit original sin.

IV. WHY CHRIST BECAME A MAN

Christ came to earth to ransom mankind from sin. The price was death (Romans 6:23 – a description more than a prescription). The reason He could pay the price and no one else could was because He was not guilty of the same crime; namely sin - that afflicted mankind. But as God, He could not die - therefore, He took on a human existence, like ours, so that He could die.

A. THE DECLARATION OF HIS DEATH

Isaiah 52:12-53:12

Matthew 16:21 – John 2:19

B. THE REASON FOR HIS DEATH

Christ died for mankind because of His great love. (1 John 4:9,10)

Mankind's sin made Christ's death necessary. (Romans 3:23)

Christ died that He might share His eternal life. (John 12:20-24)

C. THE RESULTS OF HIS DEATH

His death was payment for the sins of all. (1 Peter 2:21-24)

He is our substitute - He died in our place. (1 Peter 3:18)

His death displays the love of God for sinners. (Romans 5:8)

V. HOW CHRIST'S WORK IS APPROPRIATED

A. FALSE IDEAS

Try and do good. (Ephesians 2:8,9)

Keep the Ten Commandments.

Join a church.

B. APPROPRIATED BY FAITH

The key word is "believe". Look up and read the following verses aloud.

John 3:16

John 3:36

John 5:24

John 1:12

Acts 16:25-31

The word "believe" in these verses denotes a **heart belief**, not just a head belief. There are two types of belief. One is an intellectual assent, while the other is a heart appropriation. You can believe many things with your mind without believing them in your heart. True belief will be shown in doing what faith calls for (Matthew 7:21).

Romans 10:9 is a key verse to show how to appropriate the work of Christ.

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

VI. THE TWO NATURES OF CHRIST

A catalyst is something introduced into an experiment that elevates a particular process to another level. When the process is complete, the catalyst remains unchanged. Jesus Christ is the catalyst that takes the Divine Experiment to a higher level. Let's look at the nature of this catalyst.

A. HE WAS HUMAN

Scripture implies His humanity by the names it gives Him.
(1 Timothy 2:5; Matthew 1:1; Hebrews 2:14).

He had the following human characteristics -

He began life as a baby (Luke 2:5).

He grew and developed (Luke 2:40).

He had human emotions (John 11:35).

He had a normal appetite (John 19:28).

He had certain limitations (John 4:6).

He looked like a man (John 1:10).

He suffered and died like a man (John 19:30,34).

B. HE WAS DIVINE

The names given Him in Scripture can be applied only to one who is God.

John 1:1,14; 5:17,18; 10:30

Hebrews 1:3

Titus 2:13

John 20:28

He had qualities only one who is God could possess.

He is eternal (1 John 1:2).

He is unchangeable (Hebrews 13:8).

He is all-knowing (Colossians 2:3).

He is all-powerful (Philippians 3:30,31).

He is perfect (Colossians 1:19).

He is holy (Acts 3:14).

He is righteous (1 John 2:1).

Scripture credits Him with work only one who is God could do.

He creates (John 1:3).

He holds the elements together (Hebrews 1:3).

He forgives sin and gives eternal life. (Colossians 3:13).

He has the ability to heal (Matthew 11:4-6)

He raises the dead (John 11:24,25).

He accepts worship (John 20:28).

CONCLUSION

2 Corinthians 5:21 -

As perfect/sinless man, Jesus could serve as our representative.

As Christ (God), He could completely satisfy the demands of the righteous justice of God.
(Romans 5).

He became like us so we could become like Him...

Jesus of Nazareth, without money or arms,
conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon.
Without science and learning,
he shed more light on things human and divine
than all the philosophers and scholars combined.
Without the eloquence of the school,
he spoke words of life such as were never spoken before or since,
and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet.
Without writing a single line,
he has set more pens in motion
and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions,
works of art, learned volumes and songs of praise
than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times.
Born in a manger and crucified as a malefactor,
he now controls the destinies of the civilized world
and rules a spiritual empire which embraces one third of the inhabitants of the globe.

Philip Schaff, church historian

LOOKING AHEAD TO BEV-#4

We have now been given an overview of the Story of God's great love for us and of the manner in which that love continues to reach out in order to "buy us back".

If you have not prayed to receive God's love as evidenced in the gracious gift of His Son, I'd like to pray with you now.

BEV-#4 takes us one step further in that it tells us how we can not only know about the Story of God's love in Christ, but now how we can enter the Story ourselves and assume the unique role that is ours to play.

Resources:

The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus, Lee Strobel, Zondervan, 1998.

Description: When Lee Strobel's wife became a Christian, he found that the positive changes in her were too noticeable to ignore. Since he had a law background (Yale Law School), and was an investigative reporter, Strobel decided to subject the claims of Christianity to the type of scrutiny he used in reporting on legal cases for a major newspaper. The result: *The Case for Christ*, a book which chronicles Strobel's journey from atheist to Christian, and offers a compelling argument for the veracity of the Christian faith.

To answer his questions, Strobel decided to seek out the experts. He was hoping to learn whether the evidence we have about Jesus in the Bible was reliable and accurate. He picked the brains of the following thirteen experts: Dr. Craig Blomberg (eyewitness evidence); Dr. Bruce Metzger (documentary evidence); Dr. Edwin Yamauchi (corroborating evidence); Dr. John McRay (scientific/archaeological evidence); Dr. Gregory Boyd (rebuttal evidence); Dr. Ben Witherington III (identity evidence); Dr. Gary Collins (psychological evidence); Dr. D.A. Carson (profile evidence); Louis Lapidus, M.Div., Th.M. (fingerprint evidence); Dr. Alexander Metherell (medical evidence); Dr. William Lane Craig (evidence of the missing body); Dr. Gary Habermas (evidence of appearances); Dr. J.P. Moreland (circumstantial evidence).

After having all his questions answered, Strobel pulls the evidence together and presents the verdict. Not surprisingly, the verdict, based on legal rules for evidence, pointed to Jesus being exactly who the Bible says he is. The evidence overwhelmingly points to Jesus being the son of God, who died on the cross and rose three days later. So if you have questions about the truth of the Christian claims, or know someone who does, this book is the best place to start. Written by someone who knew which questions to ask (because he had them too), this book presents logical, rational answers that can help. 290 pages.

Dinner With a Perfect Stranger, David Gregory, Waterbrook Press, 2005

Description: How would you react to meeting somebody who says, "My name is Jesus; call me Yeshua"? When Cincinnati businessman Nick Cominsky meets such a man, he seeks to unmask the imposter. Yet the stranger knows an unnerving amount about him. Will Nick decide to continue his successful, unsatisfying life—or be forever changed by his encounter? 100 pages, hardcover from Waterbrook.



NOTES



BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE BIBLE - 4

THE BIBLE - HIS-STORY, YOUR STORY, OUR STORY

INTRODUCTION

In the previous sections of BEV, we have sought to layout an overview of the Bible - its purpose, its story, and its central character.

The Bible dares to tell us what no other book does, namely that we are a part of something larger than ourselves, an epic drama that started before we were born - even before time began – and it awaits a glorious conclusion and consummation. It is history – His-Story – ***God's Story***.

The Bible does not simply tell us about this Story, it tells us how we can in reality enter the Story for ourselves. God has made us for relationship: with Him, with others, with our own selves - relationships: vertical, horizontal, internal. The message of the Bible is that God has not only created the possibility of such relationship, He has done all that is needed to ensure it.

Steps that enable us to enter the Story...

Realize God's deep and continuing love for us.

Recognize the need to turn from our self-orientation to a God-orientation.

Accept the gracious gift of eternal life bought and paid for in the Person and work of Christ.

What needs to be done to go further up and further in

“Own” our faith and to ever more fully embrace the reality of Christ in our lives.

Engage in the refining process by which we grow our faith, endeavor to be holy even as our heavenly Father is holy (Matthew 5:48; 1 Peter 1:15,16), and in so doing, become more and more like Christ.

Enter the communal life of the body of Christ, the Church.

YOUR STORY - FROM DEATH TO LIFE

The Bible is not about how God makes bad people good, but about how God makes dead people live.

When a person accepts the gift of grace given to us in Christ, that person becomes spiritually alive and the life of the Spirit of God begins to flow in them. (Ephesians 2:1)

The Bible describes it as being “born-again”. (John 3:3-7, 1 Peter 1:23)

You are a new creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

You have a new nature. (Ephesians 4:23,24)

And you have a new heart. (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:26)

GROWING IN FAITH

The Bible compares new Christians to human babies.

They need to feed on those things that are easily digested. (1 Peter 2:2)

However, we are not to remain as babies.

We are called to grow and become strong. (Hebrews 6:1,2)

God expects us to give ourselves to the ongoing task of growth. (2 Peter 3:18)

HOW WE GROW

Mistaken Notions of Growth

It is not a function of time – time is no guarantee of maturity.

It is not a function of feelings – they can be fleeting and not reflect things in actuality.

It is not a function of imitating the actions of others – faith must be authentic.

It is not a function of following a particular set of rules – legalism produces religiosity.

Positive Means of Growth

The Word of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 2:2, John 14 & 16)

Gifted people. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

The faith community (the Church). (1 Timothy 3:15)

Deeds and acts of service that are the fruit of a living faith. (Acts 1:8, James 2:17)

Indications of Growth (Matthew 7:16-20)

Spiritual knowledge will increase. (2 Peter 3:18)

There will be a delight in spiritual things. (Philippians 3:7)

Personal faith will be strengthened and enlarged. (Galatians 2:20)

The fruit of the Spirit will be evidenced in your life, (Galatians 5:22-23), as compared to the fruit of the sinful nature, (Galatians 5:19-21).

GROWING IN HOLINESS

The initial choice, to accept and receive Christ, is followed by countless, day-to-day choices that we make as we learn to walk the path of obedient faith and holiness.

Holiness is the everyday business of every Christian. It evidences itself in the decisions we make and the things we do hour by hour, day by day. (Loving God, by Charles Colson - page 157)

HOLINESS 101

Holiness is a path. It involves a journey. It begins by a person's response to the love and grace of God, as our hearts resonate with the heart of God and we are transformed. God's first priority is to engage the heart.

"God loves you just the way you are, but He loves you too much to leave you that way!"
This statement is indicative of God's ongoing love for us. God engages the heart, and only then does He break it.

By His Holy Spirit, God refines us by convicting us of areas of our lives that are out of harmony and resonance with His Person and purpose for us. Such conviction can be painful and very personal. There are things about us that are known only to God and ourselves.

But God works in such a way that it is not a matter of God on one side, me on the other, and my sin standing between us. It is a matter of God standing beside me and the two of us confronting the reality of my sin together. (Dream of the picture gallery and Jesus going down the hall way, removing picture after picture, saying, "I've paid for this... I've paid for this..." The Healing of Damaged Emotions, by David Seamands).

Romans 8:31b asks the question: *If God is for us, who can be against us?*

Holiness is a kind of discipline –

Where we enter the disciplines required to cultivate our Christian life

And we submit ourselves to the refining work of the Holy Spirit

God always has our best interests in mind in this process.

*When through fiery trials, thy pathway shall lie
My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply
The flames will not harm thee, I only design
The dross to consume and thy gold to refine.*

from the hymn - “How Firm a Foundation” - verse 3

HOLINESS 201

Holiness is the process by which we enter into and take on the kingdom of God.

When he arrived on the scene, Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is at hand.” We can gain a sense of what the kingdom is like by looking at Jesus. Everything he ever did or said was related to the kingdom of God. He was completely and totally yielded to the will of God. He said only what God would have him say. He did only what God would have him do. His activities, in his teaching, his ministry, and the demonstration of supernatural power, were all aimed at restoring that which had been lost. He came so that the blind could see, the deaf would hear, the lame would walk, the captives would be free, and the dead would live.

While a broad view of holiness must certainly begin with the 10 Commandments, which apply today as much as they ever have, Jesus provides us with holiness in the flesh. He does so in his persevering self-denial, his unqualified obedience to the Father’s will, and the fullness of the Holy Spirit in his daily life.

Jesus declares (**Luke 5:16-20**) that he is the fulfillment of what the prophet Isaiah promised in Isaiah 61:1-2. It is a clear statement to the effect that he is the Anointed One, the Messiah.

Another word for “holy” is the word “other”. Very often, when we want to grasp the meaning of the kingdom of God, we simply need to look at the kingdom of this world and realize that the kingdom of God is “other” or the opposite. In the kingdom of God -

the first are last and the last are first (Matthew 20:16)

to give is to gain (Matthew 16:25-26)

the one who rules is the one who serves (Matthew 22:25-27)

trying to keep our lives will cause us to lose them – losing our lives will enable us to save

our lives (Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24)

SPIRITUAL REALITIES – We are to be shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. (Matthew 10:16).

The Christian walk involves a battle – We cannot afford to be naïve in this.
It is imperative that we realize that such a war exists and that we have been targeted -

THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL – There are internal and external forces that seek to oppose the plan and purpose of God.

Internal forces –

In Christ, we are made new. Our hearts are transformed. In one sense it is a done deal. In another, we need to realize that there is a civil war going on within us - (Matthew 6:24; Romans 7:14-25, 8:8-11). In the battle between the old nature and the new nature, the one that you feed will be the one that thrives.

External forces –

The world – evil is “l-i-v-e” spelled backwards – we see it in the world around us

Beyond the matter of personal sin – there is also a kind of corporate sin at work in the world – it is larger than any one individual or group – and it has a life of its own.

It is like a multi-national corporation – that is so large and powerful that it doesn’t fall under the auspices of any one nation.

The Devil – the battle is not simply personal or merely earthly in nature. It is spiritual.

The apostle Paul tells us of this ongoing battle, advising believers to “put on the whole armor of God”. (Ephesians 6:10-18)

In L.A. a number of years ago, a bank was robbed in broad daylight. The bank was surrounded by police when the robbers emerged, but the gunmen had automatic weapons that were more powerful than those of the police – and body armor and protective helmets such that the bullets of the police officers *literally bounced off of them*.

The Adversary stands against the purpose of God (John 10:10)

And “It” is real – evidence of this is seen in –

Matthew 4:1-12 – distorter of truth in the temptation of Jesus

John 8:44 – a murderer and a liar

2 Corinthians 4:4 – the god of this world

2 Corinthians 11:14 – able to masquerade as an angel of light

M. Scott Peck, in his book People of the Lie, uses the impersonal pronoun “It” when he refers to Satan, reminiscent of the Stephen King horror story by that same name, It!

Our response –

1 Peter 5:8 – be self-controlled and alert

James 4:7 – resist so that the Devil will flee

Ephesians 4:26-27 – do not give the devil a foothold

Ephesians 6:10-18 – stand armed and ready

One of the great assurances of the Bible is that God will triumph. What God originally set out to establish will come to fruition, but only after the war is finally won.

OUR STORY

The Bible is a book of stories – tales of men and women who walked with God. Approach the Scriptures not so much as a manual of Christian principles but as the testimony of God’s friends on what it means to walk with him through a thousand different episodes. (John Eldredge, Waking the Dead, p. 108)

In the same way that Frodo needed those who made up the Fellowship of the Ring, Dorothy needed the others on her journey to Oz, Neo needed the other crew members of the *Nebuchadnezzar* in The Matrix, and even Jesus drew around him his disciples –

so too – our faith must be more than private and individualistic – we need to be a part of the company of the faithful...

The Story of the Bible is not just HIS-Story or simply “your-story” – it is “**our-story**”

To be a child of God, is to become a part of the people of God.

To belong to Christ is to belong to His Church.

Jesus saw himself as part of the faith community – Luke 4:16

This understanding and commitment was reflected in the life of the Early Church – Acts 2:42-44

Paul taught the necessity of being a part of the body of Christ - 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Hebrews 10:26 speaks of the importance of togetherness in worship

God’s glory flows through His people...

Every Christian has a holy responsibility to be a part of the Church - its worship, its work, its teaching and learning ministry, and its service in the place and to the people that God gives to them – even to the ends of the earth – Matthew 28:18-20

The Church is God's idea, not ours –

It is not so much an organization as it is an organism-

It is not so much an institution as it is an investment -

God has a special concern for His Church - which is reflected in the “one-anothers” in the Second Testament. (Separate sheet)

INVITING OTHERS TO MAKE IT “THEIR-STORY” - CONNECTING TO THE LARGER WORLD

As those who have entered the Story of God – we are called upon to invite others to enter the Story as well.

By loving the world the way that God does. John 3:16.

By being faithful witnesses to the reality of Christ in our lives – individually and corporately. Acts 1:8.

By loving one another and being unified such that the world sees Christ through us.
John 17:20-21.

By caring for the “least of these” in the world. Matthew 25:40.

Sharing the very purpose of the life of Christ in our lives. Isaiah 61:1-3.

IN CLOSING – A “WHO” QUESTION AND A “WHAT” QUESTION

THE “WHO” QUESTION

Jesus raises an essential question in Matthew 16, “Who do others say I am?” (And later) “Who do you say that I am?”

This question is the most important and direct question we can ask – of ourselves and of others.

To answer it is to come to grips with the very purpose of our existence, namely to know God and to love God forever

THE “WHAT” QUESTION

In the Lord of the Rings trilogy, Sam Gamgee at one point turns to Frodo Baggins and asks, “What kind of tale have we gotten ourselves into?”

In Bird's Eye View, we have asked a question that is very similar. It is now yours to answer. It will take a lifetime, and longer, to do so.

Resources:

Waking the Dead, the Glory of a Heart Fully Alive, John Eldredge, Nelson Books, 2003

Description: In *Waking the Dead* John Eldredge cuts straight to the heart. With characteristic insight and wit, Eldredge explains how the renewed heart is at the center of the Christian faith. Eldredge also explores how Christian practices, such as discipleship, revitalize our hearts by empowering us to love God more passionately and live for the hearts of others. *Waking the Dead* will inspire and encourage you as you learn to live from the heart.

Epic, The Story That God Is Telling and the Role That Is Yours to Play, John Eldredge, Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2004

Description: From the best-selling author of *Wild at Heart* comes a challenge to view your life as a story—in which God is not only the author, but the main character! Learn why we all love movies and fairy tales from childhood—and how the universal longing for a "plot" testifies to God's existence. 96 pages, 4.5" x 6.25" hardcover from Nelson.

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, Zondervan, 2003

Description: Enjoy God's Word to the fullest! This classic reader-friendly manual explains the different kinds of biblical literature—such as prophecy, Gospels, poetry, and history—so you can get the most from them. The newly revised third edition includes an updated list of recommended resources and a new section on the Song of Songs. 288 pages, softcover from Zondervan.



NOTES

BEV #4 – THE “ONE ANOTHERS”

POSITIVE

Be at peace with **one another** - Mark 9:50,

Saying (speaking/questioning) to **one another** – Luke 8:25

Wash **one another's** feet – John 13:14

Love **one another** – John 13:34; 15:17; Romans 12:10; 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 4:9;
1 Peter 1:22, 4:8; 1 John 3:11, 3:23, 4:7, 4:11-12; 2 John 1:5

People will know you are my disciples if you love **one another** – John 13:35

This is my commandment, that you love **one another** – John 15:12

Outdo **one another** in showing honor – Romans 12:10

Live in harmony with **one another** – Romans 12:16

Live in harmony with **one another**, in accord with Christ Jesus – Romans 15:5

Welcome **one another** as God has welcomed you – Romans 15:7

instruct **one another** – Romans 15:14

Greet **one another** with a holy kiss (affection) – Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20;
2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14

wait for **one another** – 1 Corinthians 11:33

care for **one another** – 1 Corinthians 12:25

Comfort **one another**... ..agree with one another – 2 Corinthians 13:11

serve **one another** – Galatians 5:13

Bear **one another's** burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ – Galatians 6:2

with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with **one another** in love
- Ephesians 4:2

Be kind to **one another**, tenderhearted, forgiving **one another**, as God in Christ forgave you
- Ephesians 4:32

addressing **one another** in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making
melody to the Lord with all your heart - Ephesians 5:19

submitting to **one another** out of reverence for Christ – Ephesians 5:21

bearing with **one another** and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive – Colossians 3:13

teaching and admonishing **one another** in all wisdom – Colossians 3:16

encourage **one another**... ...build up **one another** - 1 Thessalonians 5:11

not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging **one another** – Hebrews 10:25

Do good to **one another** and to everyone – 1 Thessalonians 5:15

the love of every one of you for **one another** is increasing – 2 Thessalonians 1:3

exhort **one another** every day – Hebrew 3:13

And let us consider how to stir up **one another** to love and good works - Hebrews 10:24

confess your sins to **one another** and pray for **one another**, that you may be healed
- James 5:16

As each has received a gift, use it to serve **one another**, as good stewards of God's varied grace - 1 Peter 4:10

have fellowship with **one another** - 1 John 1:7

NEGATIVE

Let us not pass judgment on **one another** – Romans 14:13

(don't be like those who) – measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with **one another**, they are without understanding – 2 Corinthians 10:12

But if you bite and devour **one another**, watch out that you are not consumed by **one another**
- Galatians 5:15

Let us not become conceited, provoking **one another**, envying **one another** – Galatians 5:26

Do not lie to **one another**, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices -
- Colossians 3:9

we ourselves were once... hated by others and hating **one another** – Titus 3:3

Do not speak evil against **one another** – James 4:11

Do not grumble against **one another** – James 5:9

CHAPTER FIVE

Outcomes, Conclusions, and Recommendations

OUTCOMES – BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK/ LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this thesis was to consider Radical Faith from a biblical vantage point and through the lens of science. Biblically, faith is shown to be alive and dynamic rather than staid and immovable. In the movement from the premodern to the modern to the postmodern era, science has been a defining point with regard to popular understanding of faith. Premodernism corresponds to a pre-scientific age. Modernity corresponds to the scientific age. And postmodernism corresponds to a time when science has been shown to be less than perfect and incapable of answering all of the questions that it once claimed to answer. If postmodernism is a transitional time period, the question remains, “What lies beyond it?” To answer this question from a scientific standpoint, it can only be said that we do not yet know all that there is to know. Science finds itself mired in the quandary of the quantum. Nothing is certain any longer. Everything seems to be up for grabs. This quandary has translated to the university (the seed-bed of postmodernism) and now, over time, to the Church where relativism and subjectivism are strongly in evidence. At this juncture, the parallel between faith and science comes to bear. Although a modern view of faith as a die-cast entity no longer exists, that is not to say that truth doesn’t exist. To say that there is more truth yet to be discovered does not discount the truth that already exists. The dynamic of Scripture is such that it can speak to any age. It has in the past. It can in the present. And it will in the future. Science is at a

transitional state. Many things are in a state of flux, but this does not mean that they shall remain that way. The hope of science is that ongoing discoveries will produce scientific truth that will answer the questions of today and raise new questions for tomorrow. To artificially impose the doubts and questions of science into the realm of faith is not justifiable. Christianity and science are two inter-related “faith-systems”, which although related, they are nevertheless distinct. The pursuit of biblical truth and the pursuit of scientific truth are separate disciplines. It is too easy for each of these respective disciplines to make unilateral pronouncements on the other and then hide behind the validity of their own ‘faith’ arguments. The two wind up talking past one another. The goal of this thesis is to find some common ground between the two in order to facilitate the ongoing conversation in light of the knowledge that all truth is God’s truth.

OUTCOMES – SURVEY DEVELOPMENT AND ANALYSIS

Developing and executing a survey was an ironic contradiction in terms for a thesis focusing on postmodernism. It is to use a modern tool to assess a postmodern question. The use of a survey would not have been an issue if the question at hand was strictly a postmodern question. The Church, at the beginning of this 21st century, is moving in a postmodern direction but it has hardly arrived. This is especially true of the church around which this survey operated. As a socially conservative, traditionally-minded church, very few people even know the term postmodern, much less think in that manner. But postmodernism is at work in the culture in many ways of which people are unaware. Relativism and subjectivism are not unique to postmodernism. They are the outworking of modernity rather than the

invention of postmodernity. The survey was developed in order to create a line of demarcation to sorts – to get some idea of where the people of the church stood on matters of faith so that, by a number of different means, effective ministry can take place. In the past, Chiltonville Congregational Church has not laid a great deal of stress on biblical teaching. This was evidenced in that some of the respondents had never given much thought to the kind of questions that were raised. It might be interesting to administer the survey again, now some four years later.

The survey was telling in that even in areas where the respondents did not answer in a particularly orthodox manner, there was still solid evidence from the survey that those with the highest “orthodoxy quotient” did grasp the essential nature of the statements in question. This points to the consistency of the survey as an accurate tool of faith assessment.

OUTCOMES – BIRD’S EYE VIEW OF THE BIBLE

Bird’s Eye View of the Bible (BEV) was the tangible result of Parts 1 & 2 of this thesis.

The material has been taught as an Adult Church School class. Although this is contrary to the one-on-one or one-on-two design for the material, many who took the course see it as a turning point in their spiritual development and still reference it frequently in Bible study and in conversation.

BEV has been taught in four instances with two participants and in one instance with one participant. The couples were at different points in their relationship with Christ and with the church. In one couple in particular, the husband and wife were at very different levels of spiritual maturity. BEV created wonderful teachable moments

as questions came to light and were discussed. Some of the material came across as being new, but beyond this participants were excited to see the connectedness and consistency of the message of Scripture for themselves. It is gratifying to see couples drawn more deeply into their faith walk with Christ and more deeply in their marital lives as well.

BEV is currently being used in a highly modified form as Church School lesson material for Middle School students (grades 6-8). One possibility for BEV would be to do something more formal with different age groups (Middle School, High School, young adults) in mind. Another approach would be to look at the primary Scriptures that are in each section of BEV, to study them, and draw out the relevant principles from them rather than work with a principle to Scripture approach. This approach could involve more time, but it would also provide the student with a sense of personal discovery as they learned and were mentored.

Another possibility involves some kind of website for BEV. This would give wider access to the material and would provide an opportunity for others to make suggestions to improve the material based on their experience.

One intention for BEV is that it become a teaching instrument that others will use. Those who have taken the course and would like to teach it will be trained to teach others. The training format would parallel the BEV format of four sessions. As BEV teachers are trained, more people will be reached. People who are friends and acquaintances of BEV teachers, who have little or no contact with the church, would be candidates for BEV. In the course of going through the material, especially BEV#4 which stresses involvement in the community of faith, the unchurched would be

encouraged to become part of a church that would specifically speak to their needs in the context of their spiritual journey.

BEV could also be used as a mini-catechism. It could be utilized when people join the church as members. An adapted version could be used with high school students as a part of lesson material on church membership. In this setting, those that have been trained as teachers of BEV could be mentors for one or two of the students.

Possibilities also exist for follow-up to BEV. Small group meetings could focus on the Bible studies that are listed in the books and resources. Monthly book clubs could read selected books from those listed at the end of each section.

To summarize, this thesis works to present a comprehensive view and approach to the truth of God in the life of the church. It does so, first, in how we see the truth of God in a rooted and dynamic way. Second, through the lens of science, we can see that we do not have a corner on the truth, that there is more to come, but that truth will be consistent with existing dynamic as well as lead us more deeply into the fullness of God's truth.

The survey of Section 2 seeks to make tangible a person's place in their faith journey. The survey reflected a wide diversity among those who responded. And where the scores were consistently high, there was a correspondence in a right understanding and administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

BEV works in the life of the people in the church because it speaks to people as individuals while at the same time incorporating them into the greater context of the

faith community. These two elements work together to make BEV effective in and of itself and as a part of the larger, overall ministry of the Word in the church.

APPENDIX ONE

My Personal Pilgrimage

Beliefs never exist in a vacuum. For this reason, the basis of this thesis is better understood as it is “fleshed-out” in terms of my own (ongoing) pilgrimage or journey of faith. Like anyone, I am the product of influences, ideas, and decisions that have taken place in my life. I would not hold my own experience to be objective or even normative, but that is not to say it is not valuable in understanding the basis of this thesis. And so, this thesis benefits from a rendering of my own pilgrimage and how the need for essential faith developed in my own walk of faith.

I was born and raised in Plymouth, Massachusetts. I am the product of a middle-class upbringing at a time when the town was small and we lived in (what was then) a rural area of town. My father was a disgruntled Catholic who had left the Catholic Church when he married a non-Catholic. His German Catholic family was very unforgiving of this. My mother was (is) largely indifferent to spiritual things. It was my father who insisted that my older brother and sister and me get to Sunday School and later to youth fellowship meetings at the predominant Congregational Church in the center of town. My involvement was primarily social, although I did learn some of the basic Bible stories while in Sunday School. For the most part, the church was liberal in its theology. No clear Gospel was proclaimed from the pulpit nor put forth in the teaching ministry of the church. When my father and mother and I moved to the Worcester area in 1968, just before my senior year in high school, I was told I could do with the church what I wanted. I decided immediately that I wanted nothing to do

with the church. Church people were hypocritical and political. In addition, the church had never seriously entertained the questions that I had as a teenager. Looking back, I'm not so sure about my own ability to formulate the proper questions, but regardless, I was left to wander spiritually. And so I parted company with the church, with the intention that I would never return. At this point in time, my real philosophy/theology in life began to surface. I had been raised on the Puritan work ethic. My father had told us, as children, that his faith was in what a man could do for himself. The manner in which he had overcome many difficulties in life only bore out the consistency of this belief in his life. And so, I set out to become a self-made individual. While in college, I married my high school sweetheart. I continued in school, working full-time days and going to school full-time nights. I was doing the work, paying the dues, to become what I could make of myself. Then God altered my direction. A young couple moved into the apartment building we were living in and they were fresh out of the University of Connecticut having been active in the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship there. Dave struck up a friendship with me and over time we began to talk philosophy and theology. I was attending Stonehill College, a college founded by Jesuits. Stonehill required a certain number of religious studies courses in my program, so I was primed and ready for the debate. Dave effectively challenged my spiritual assumptions. Did I see myself as a Christian and why? Was it because I was born in the U.S.? Was it because I had gone to a Protestant, be it nominal at best, church? "What makes a person a Christian?" was the basic question that came to the surface. I had to admit a lack of understanding as to how to answer that question. The subject came to a head in talking about the Person of Jesus Christ. I can remember the after-dinner discussion when Dave asked if I knew

that Jesus Christ had claimed to be God. My response was very direct, “I know what blasphemy is, and that’s blasphemy.” Dave’s response was equally direct, “Only if it’s not true. Will you look into it for yourself?” Ever up for a challenge, I began to investigate the claims to deity on the part of Jesus. I began to read and study the Bible for myself for the first time. Not only did I discover that my knowledge of Jesus was very limited. I also quickly came to the realization that the resurrection was the crowning proof of the Christ’s claims of deity. And so, I focused my attention on trying to debunk the resurrection. I wondered, “How could something so unbelievable possibly be true.” In studying the Scriptures and reading a number of books on the subject, I came to realize that there was (is) more to Jesus than I had ever known. In embracing the validity of the Biblical text, I came to know that if Jesus is the Christ, the only proper response on my part was a response of faith. Having said that, I was quick to indicate that my skepticism would remain intact and that if there was ever a time when I could rip a hole in this “thing” called Christianity, then I would rip the fabric of faith from top to bottom and actively expose it to others. The rest is history. Briefly, my walk of faith grew rapidly. I sensed God’s call to get further theological training and preparation for pastoral ministry. One aspect of my call was to go to places like the church I had come out of. To bring the truth of the Gospel to people in the category of those: “...having a form of godliness but denying its power...” (2 Timothy 3:6).

Fast-forwarding now, I’d like to move to the second reason for the need for essential faith. It is necessary in terms of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ clearly and consistently. It is also necessary as a unifying factor in the Church

Universal and as a counter-cultural influence in the day and age in which we live. My experience in ministry has shown me that the inconsistency within the church is only exceeded by the inconsistency, tension, and derision in the corporate Church. I read once that Baptists reproduce like cats, only with much snarling and fighting. It's not just true of Baptists. Churches seem to function best when they stand in opposition to someone or something. The Scriptures tell us that Christ will build his Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). We are also told that it is the Lord's desire that the Church be presented in a way that is without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish – but radiant, holy, and blameless (Ephesians 5:27). I ask myself if we're talking about the same Church/church that I have seen and known in my experience? There is no question that it will take an act of God to accomplish what Paul describes in Ephesians 5. The Church is dis-unified both within and without. In the mainline churches, there is factionalism, competitiveness, shallowness, duplicity, and a willingness to do what is popular at the expense of what is right and true. On the other side of the ledger, the evangelical church has a bent toward being isolationist, disconnected, and immediate. As a result, a unified witness to the world is lacking. On the one hand, many do not take the Church seriously, and on the other, people are more and more inclined to be “spiritual” apart from being religious. The Church has become less a part of the equation even for many who have had a “born-again” experience. Those outside of the Church want no part of it because all they can see is infighting and division. In a culture that is plagued by dysfunction and holds sacred the importance of making choices or “keeping one's options open”, why would this work in any way to make the Church a worthwhile choice. Essential belief is just that, essential. Essential means that not

only can it not be done away with, but that we cannot live without it. The thought that Christianity is one option among many is not new to the postmodern era. What makes the task of communicating the crucial nature of Christian faith is that it is viewed as simply another set of truth claims that is as valid as any other. To subscribe to this way of thinking would take Christianity out of the category of being “essential”. In addition to the theological and philosophical attack upon essential Christian belief, the present day has brought us any number of moral, political, social, and technological challenges to our faith, not from the direction of what biblical truth might have to say, but from the standpoint of “what’s in it for me.” This mentality, also, did not originate with the postmodern era, but it does find its own particular expression there.

My calling, and my present work in the church I serve, is to bring the reality of essential belief to bear. I see an enormous need to evangelize the church, but not in a revivalistic manner. The cultivation of essential belief must not be dictatorial or dogmatic. It must be both God-centered and person-oriented. Rather than tell people what to believe, they need to have a sense that they are invited and involved in a quest, an odyssey of faith and discovery. If I can be in it with them and they with me, and if the Lord Himself is over, under, and integral the entire process, then the quest for essential belief can be an effective way of being used of God that people might embrace Christ as Savior and Lord, thus expanding the kingdom of God.

APPENDIX TWO

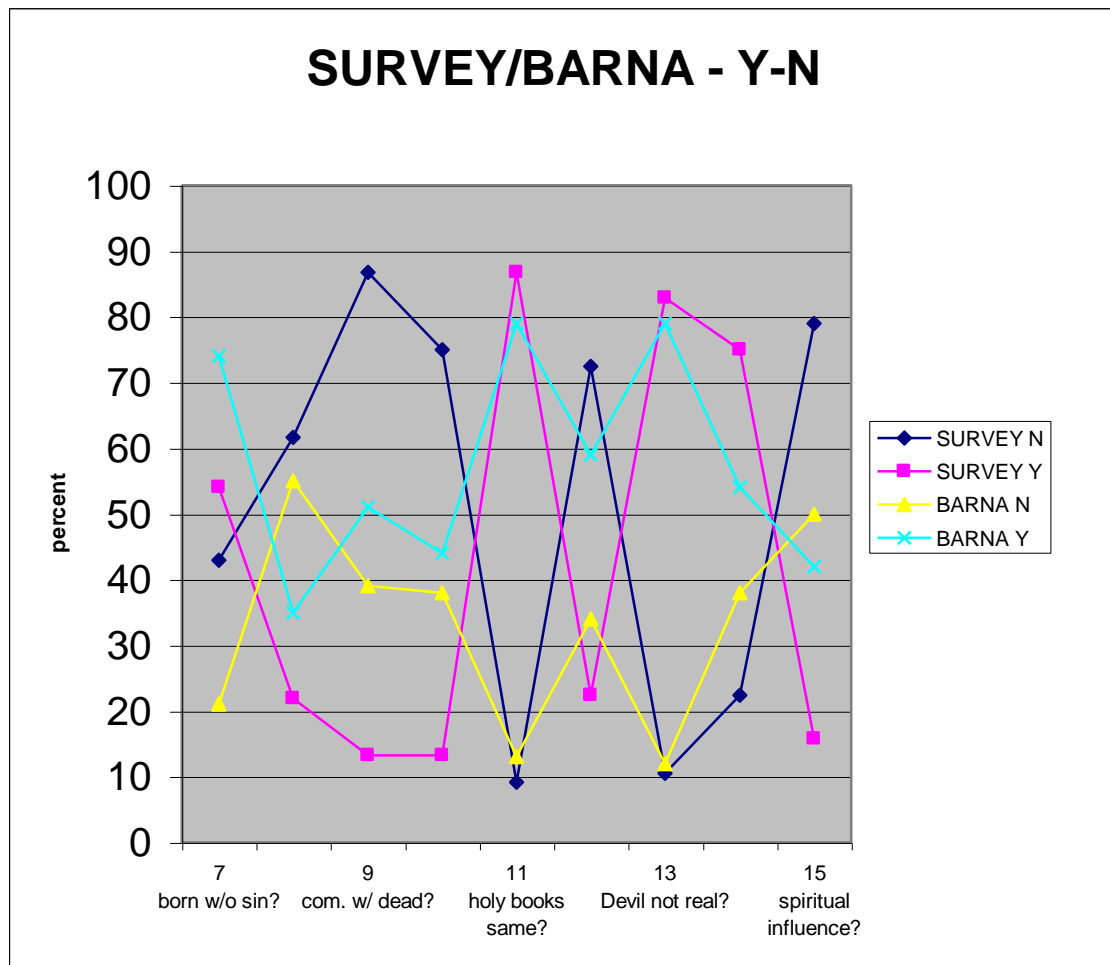
Graphs and Charts

(i.e. GRAPH 1-1 – refers to CHART #1 – first graph)

(From RADICAL FAITH – Chapter Three – page 93)

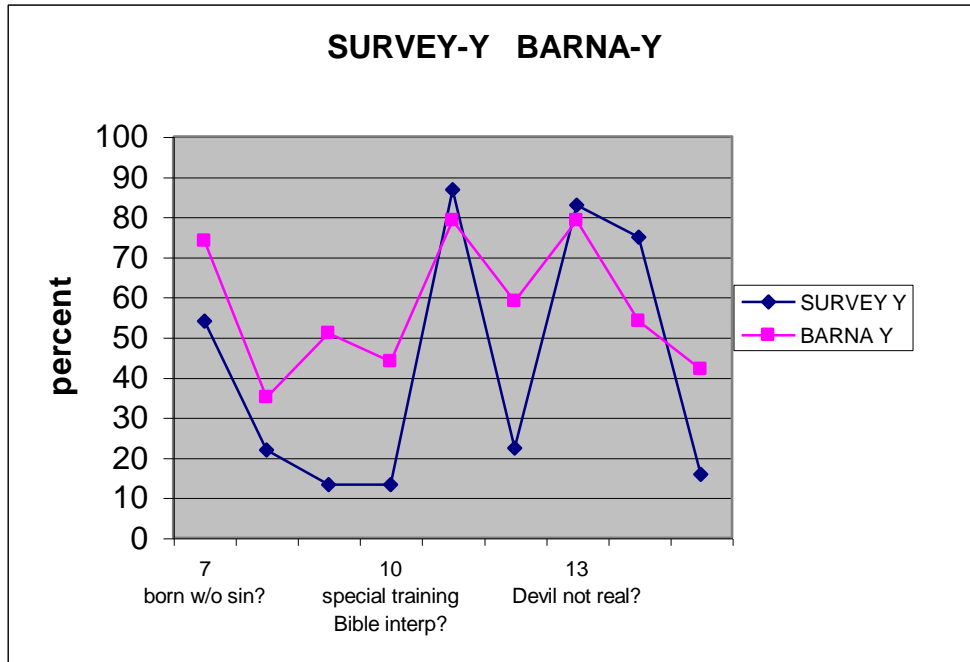
This graph represents a collective comparison of the YES and NO survey responses as compared to those of Barna Research.

GRAPH 1-1

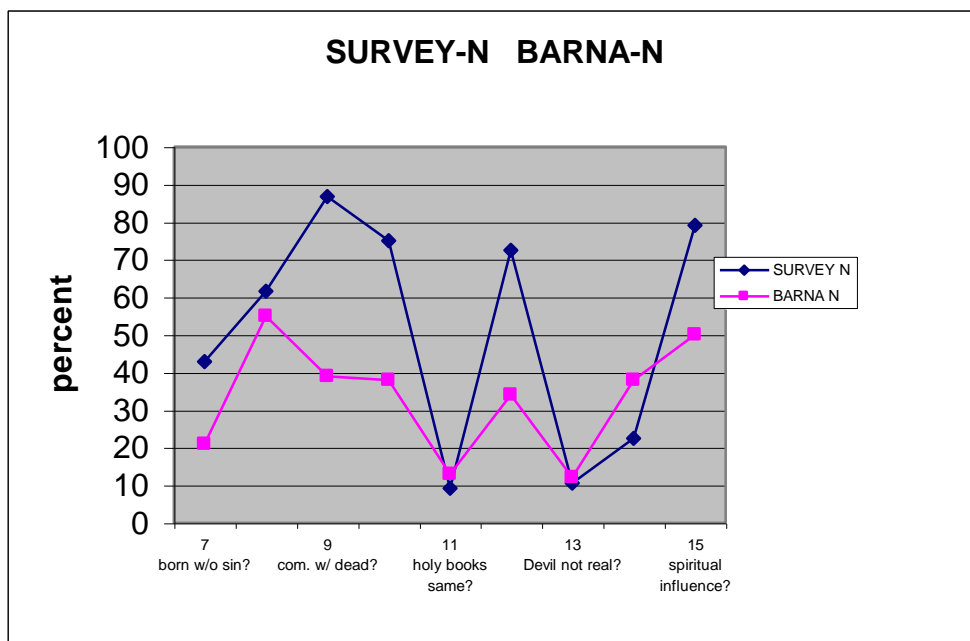


These 2 graphs depict the YES and NO responses (Survey/Barna) viewed separately.

GRAPH 1-2



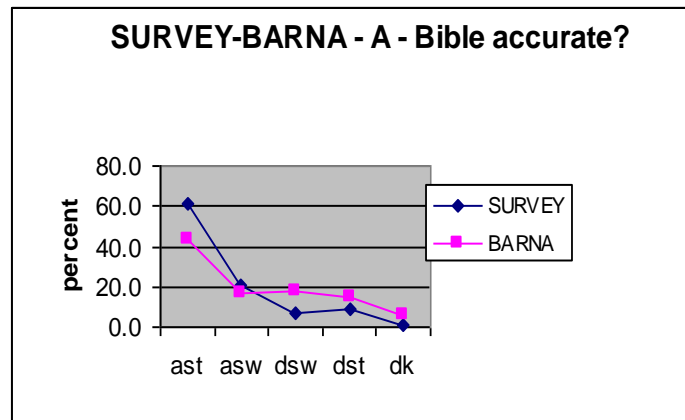
GRAPH 1-3



These graphs depict the AGREE/DISAGREE questions (Survey/Barna).

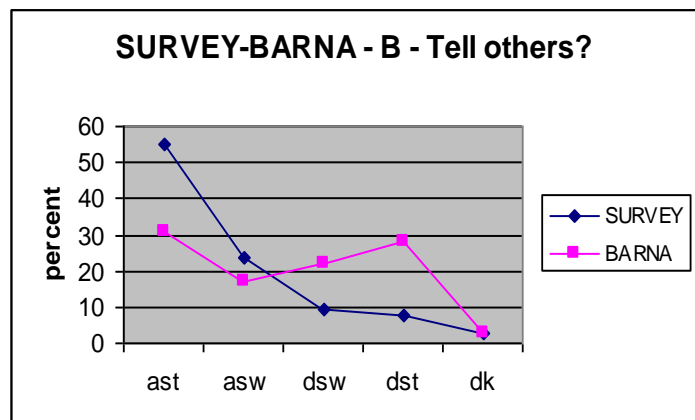
A
Bible accurate?

	SURVEY	BARNA
<i>ast</i>	61.1	43
<i>asw</i>	20.8	17
<i>dsw</i>	6.6	18
<i>dst</i>	9.2	15
<i>dk</i>	1.3	6



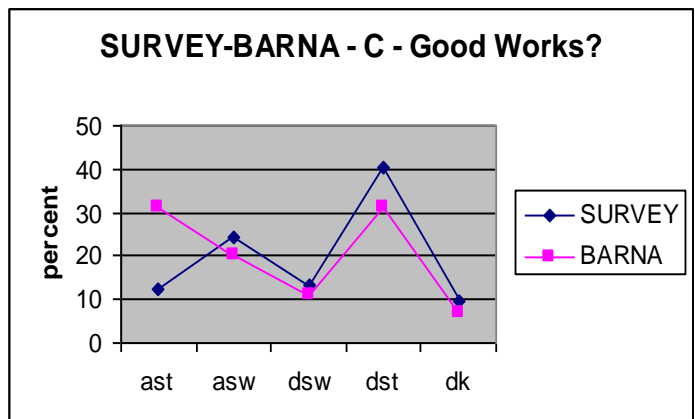
B
tell others?

	SURVEY	BARNA
<i>ast</i>	54.8	31
<i>asw</i>	23.4	17
<i>dsw</i>	9.1	22
<i>dst</i>	7.8	28
<i>dk</i>	2.6	3



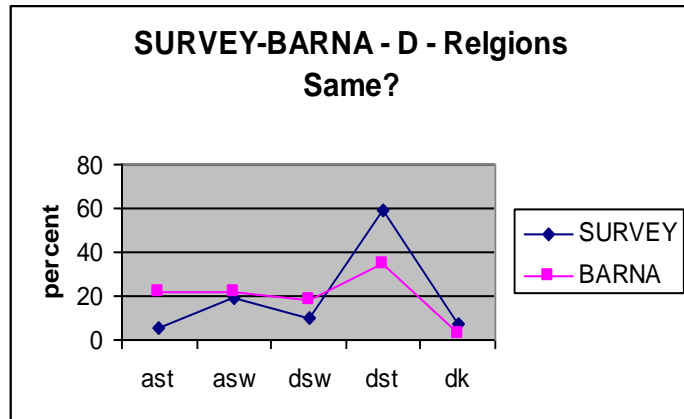
C
good works?

	SURVEY	BARNA
<i>ast</i>	12.2	31
<i>asw</i>	24.3	20
<i>dsw</i>	13.5	11
<i>dst</i>	40.5	31
<i>dk</i>	9.5	7



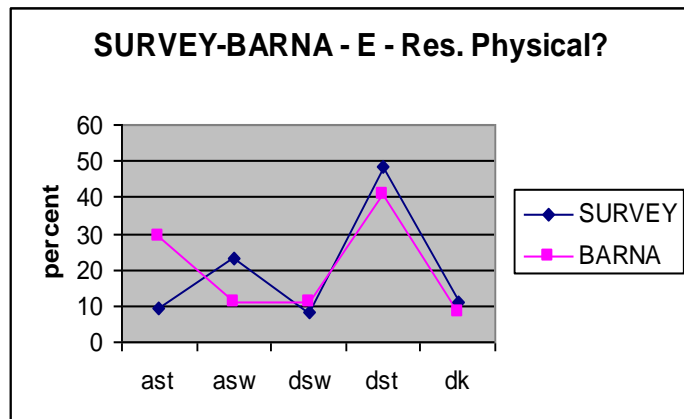
D
all religions
same teach-
ings?

	SURVEY	BARNA
<i>ast</i>	5.5	22
<i>asw</i>	19.2	22
<i>dsw</i>	9.6	18
<i>dst</i>	58.9	35
<i>dk</i>	6.9	3



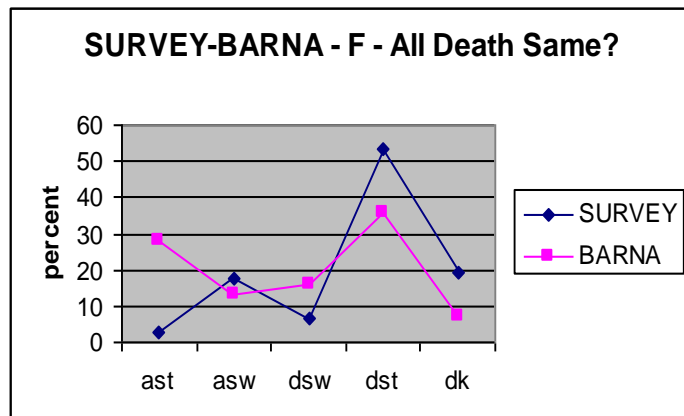
E
res.-not
physical?

	SURVEY	BARNA
<i>ast</i>	9.5	29
<i>asw</i>	23	11
<i>dsw</i>	8.1	11
<i>dst</i>	48.7	41
<i>dk</i>	10.8	8



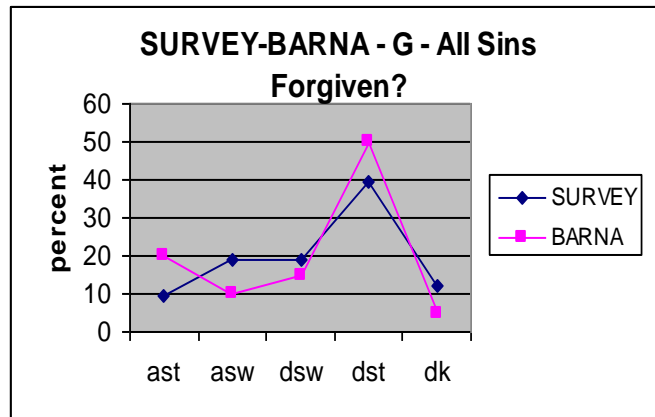
F
death - all
same?

	SURVEY	BARNA
<i>ast</i>	2.7	28
<i>asw</i>	17.8	13
<i>dsw</i>	6.8	16
<i>dst</i>	53.4	36
<i>dk</i>	19.2	7



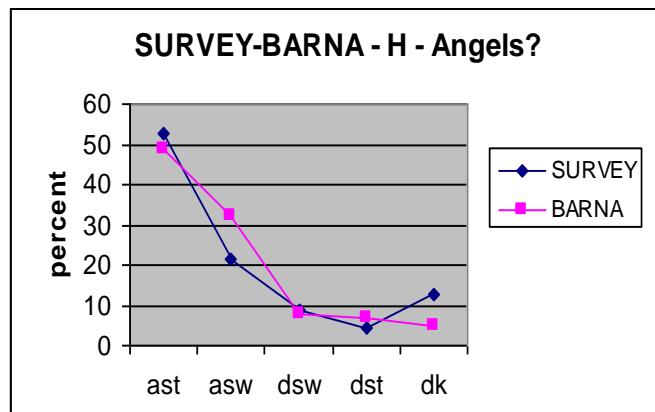
G
all sins,
forgiven?

	SURVEY	BARNA
<i>ast</i>	9.6	20
<i>asw</i>	19.2	10
<i>dsw</i>	19.2	15
<i>dst</i>	39.7	50
<i>dk</i>	12.3	5



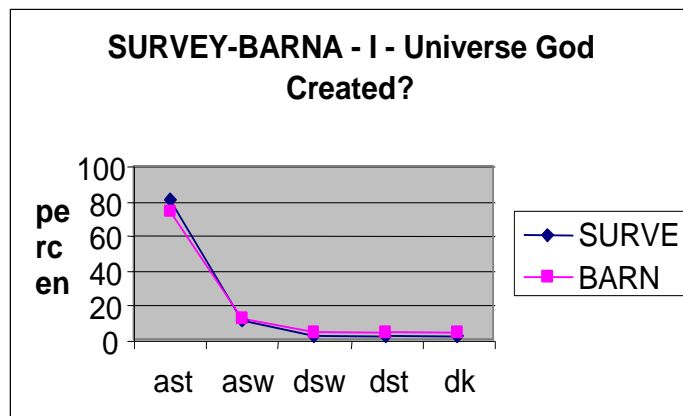
H
angels?

	SURVEY	BARNA
<i>ast</i>	52.9	49
<i>asw</i>	21.4	32
<i>dsw</i>	8.6	8
<i>dst</i>	4.3	7
<i>dk</i>	12.9	5



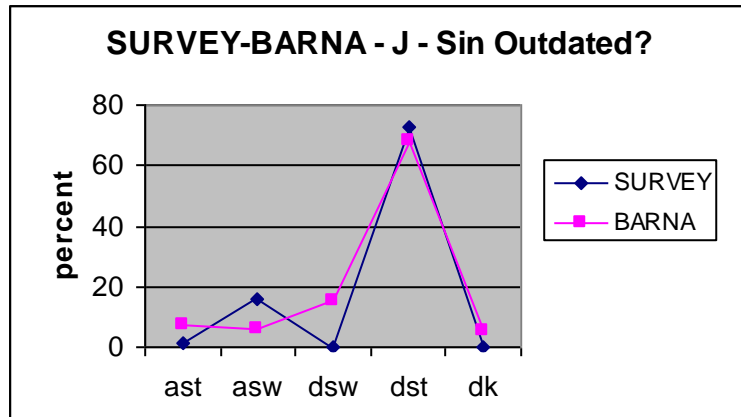
I
universe cr e-
ated
by God?

	SURVEY	BARNA
<i>ast</i>	80.8	74
<i>asw</i>	11	13
<i>dsw</i>	2.7	4
<i>dst</i>	2.7	5
<i>dk</i>	2.7	4



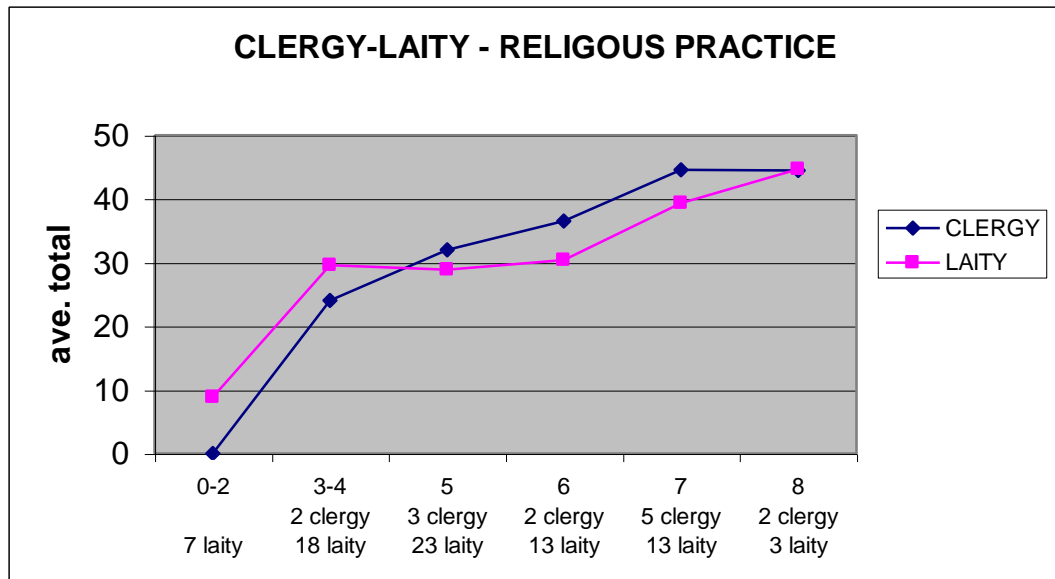
J
sin
outdated?

	SURVEY	BARNA
<i>ast</i>	1.4	7
<i>asw</i>	15.7	6
<i>dsw</i>	8.60%	15
<i>dst</i>	72.9	68
<i>dk</i>	0	5

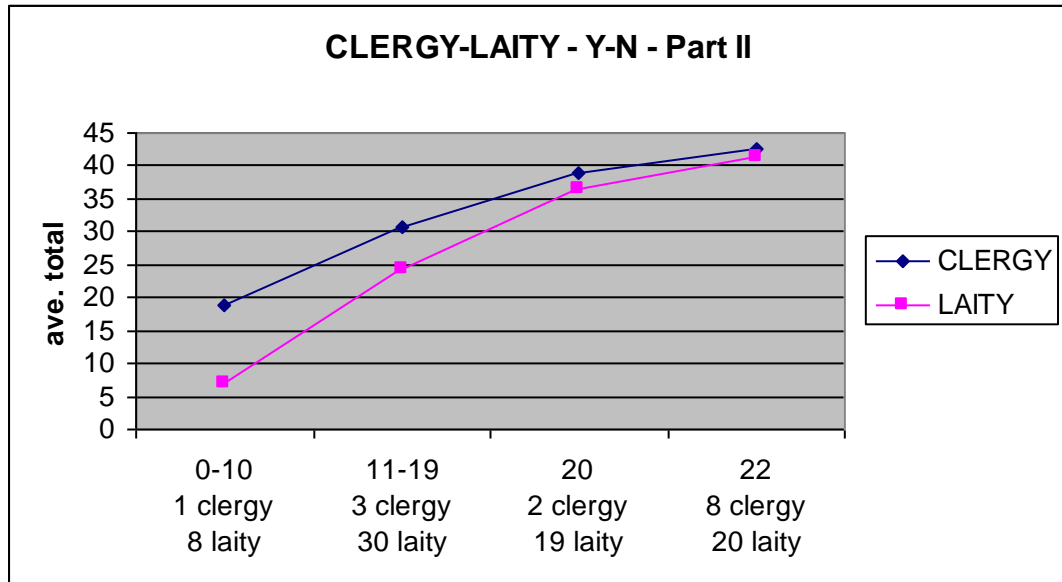


(From RADICAL FAITH – Chapter Three – page 95)

GRAPH 2-1

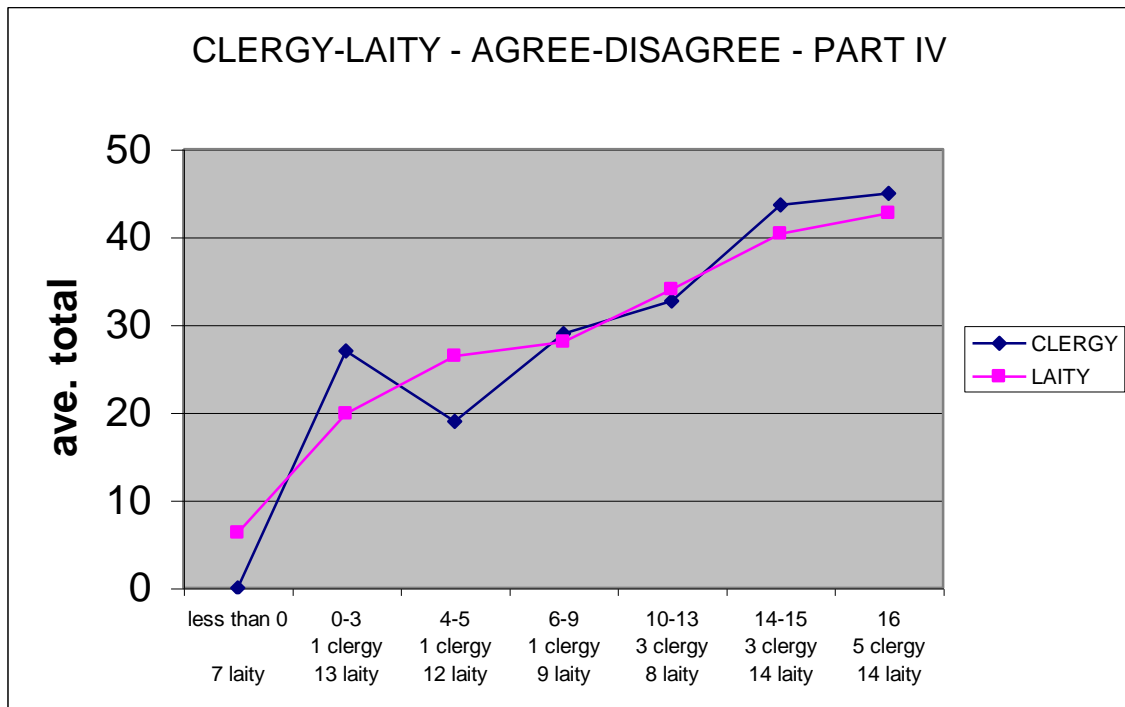


GRAPH 2-2



(From RADICAL FAITH – Chapter Three – page 96)

GRAPH 19-1



(From RADICAL FAITH – Chapter Three – page 105)

A comparison of Question #7 and Question c.

CHART #12

	#7	c.	
1	no	ast	1
2	no	asw	
3	no	asw	
4	no	asw	
5	no	asw	
6	no	asw	
7	no	asw	
8	no	asw	7
9	no	dk	1
10	no	dst	
11	no	dst	
12	no	dst	
13	no	dst	
14	no	dst	
15	no	dst	
16	no	dst	
17	no	dst	
18	no	dst	
19	no	dst	
20	no	dst	

21	no	dst	
22	no	dst	
23	no	dst	
24	no	dst	
25	no	dst	
26	no	dst	
27	no	dst	
28	no	dst	
29	no	dst	
30	no	dst	22

31	no	dsw
32	no	dsw
33	no	
34	unsure	dk
35	xxx	dst
36	yes	ast
37	yes	ast
38	yes	ast
39	yes	ast
40	yes	ast
41	yes	ast
42	yes	ast
43	yes	ast
44	yes	asw
45	yes	asw
46	yes	asw
47	yes	asw
48	yes	asw
49	yes	asw
50	yes	asw
51	yes	asw
52	yes	asw
53	yes	asw
54	yes	asw
55	yes	dk
56	yes	dk
57	yes	dst
58	yes	dst
59	yes	dst
60	yes	dst
61	yes	dst
62	yes	dst
63	yes	dst
64	yes	dst
65	yes	dsw

2

8

66	yes	dsw
67	yes	dsw
68	yes	dsw
69	yes	dsw
70	yes	dsw
71	yes	dsw

72	yes	dsw comment
73	yes	xxx
74	yes	xxx
75	yes	xxx
76	yes	
77	yes	

8

When laid out in chart form, the comparison is as follows:

CHART #14

#7	(correct ans.) no/disagree		C
original sin?	no	yes	saved by good works?
	1	8	ast
	7	11	asw
	2	8	dsw
	22	8	dst
	1	2	dk
	33	37	

24	70	34.30%
----	----	--------

overall agreement ratio

This chart combines information taken from Survey Responses to Question 7 (in the YES-NO section) and Question C (in the Agree-Disagree section).

It is important to recall the exact wording of Question 7 and Question C:

Question 7 –

I believe that when people are born, they are neither good nor evil, they make a choice between the two as they mature.

Question c –

If a person is generally good, or does enough good things for others during their lifetime, they will earn a place in Heaven.

EXPLANATION:

Keeping in mind that **“no/disagree”** is the most correct answer – and that **“yes/agree”** is the least correct answer.

(note: “correctness” is defined in terms of orthodoxy as outlined earlier.)

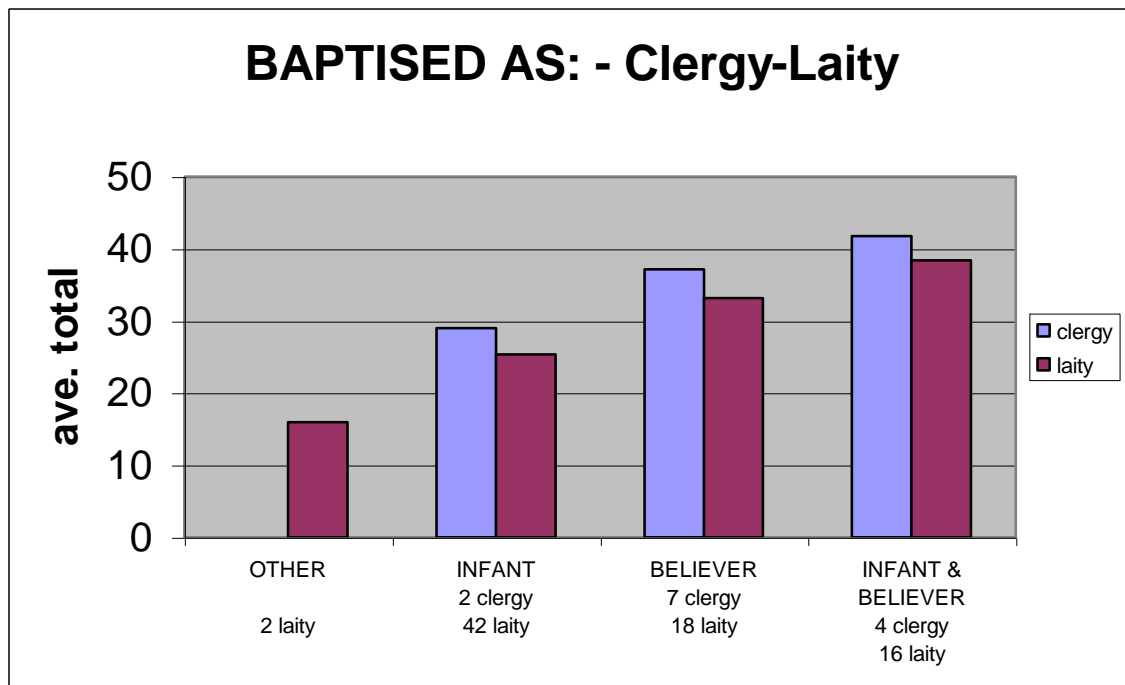
By adding 2 (no/dsw) and 22 (no/dst) the result shows that 24 respondents disagreed in response to Question 7.

The total agreement ratio is calculated by dividing the number of “correct” answers by the total number of responses.

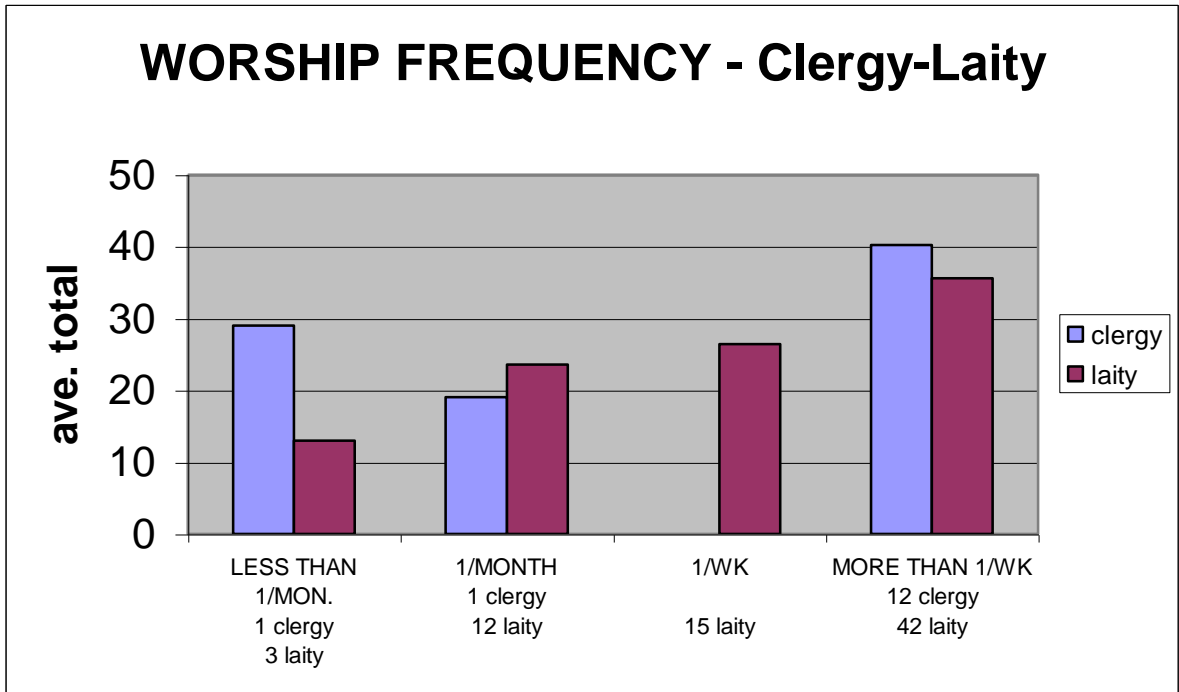
In the above instance, the total agreement ratio is 34.30%. ($24/70 = 34.30\%$)

(From RADICAL FAITH – Chapter Three – pages 114-115)

GRAPH 21-1



GRAPH 22-1



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